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This is a critical and qualitative research study exploring the work of four contemporary artists using social art practice as a form of public pedagogy. The study examines a collection of projects authored by each artist to understand the political and ethical dimensions of this work and the complexity of teacher/artist identity. The aim is to consider how these practices operate pedagogically, and how social and participatory artworks more generally produce public pedagogies. During the summer of 2013, a series of mushroom hunts were organized to collaboratively discuss each artist's work, and reflect on the field art education. Throughout fungi is used as a post-formal epistemological lens to deterritorialize boundaries between art and education, and as a material for collaborative dialogue and art making.

The findings of the study shed light on the changing nature of art education and teacher/artist subjectivity. Artists involved in this work were found to take on a number of complex and shifting identities that affect their capacity for critical reflection. This is complicated by the institutionalization of social practice and public pedagogy, impacting the ethical and political scope of this work, which is predominantly available to privileged middle to upper class white students and publics. Despite this, the majority of artworks explored in this study are able to circulate critical public pedagogies as an alternative to conventional arts education, offering examples of experiential, project and place-based approaches to learning and critical pedagogy.

MYCOLOGICAL PROVISIONS: AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE  
OF FOUR CONTEMPORARY TEACHING ARTISTS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The role of the composer is other than it was. Teaching, too, is no longer transmission of a body of useful information, but's conversation, alone, together, whether in a place appointed or not in that place, whether with those concerned or those unaware of what is being said. We talk, moving from one idea to another as though we were [mushroom] hunters. (John Cage, 1963, pg. 21)

*Mycological Provisions* is a critical and qualitative research study exploring the work of four contemporary artists using social art practice as a form of public pedagogy. The study examines a collection of projects authored by each artist to understand the political and ethical dimensions of this work and the complexity of teacher/artist identity. The aim is to consider how these practices operate pedagogically, and how social and participatory artworks more generally produce public pedagogies.

Artists involved in this study include Robert Peterson a documentarian from Shreveport, LA and producer of *Radio Transmission Ark*; Cassie Thornton, a performance artist and organizer of the *Feminist Economics Department* based in San Francisco; Caroline Woolard an artist, designer, and co-founder of *OurGoods* and *Trade School* in Brooklyn, NY; and Kate Clark, an interdisciplinary sculptor and student at the University of California San Diego. Their work draws from a number of contemporary art practices, exploring a renewed interest in art making that is participatory and socially engaged.

During the summer of 2013, an interview and mushroom hunt was organized with each artist to discuss their practice and reflect more broadly on the field of art education. These engagements, in addition to an introductory survey and focus group, provide a context for research presented here. Throughout fungi is used as a post-formal and critical lens to complicate a relationship between art and education, and as a material for collaborative dialogue and art making.

The research practices of a/r/tography and portraiture informs a critical and arts-based research methodology, offering visual and digital media works to support findings from the study. A theoretical analysis draws from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome, John Cage's (1961) concept of indeterminacy, Henry Giroux (2000) and Jennifer Sandlin's (2008; 2014) critique of public pedagogy, Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2005) idea of the learning self, and Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg's (1993) concept of post-formalism. Additionally, a review of literature will examine the field of contemporary art education and public pedagogy, making integral links to the intersectionality of race, class and gender.

To provide a context for this analysis, a collection of artworks from each participant will be considered. While there are a number of ways to characterize these projects, Ellsworth (2005) describes them as "communicative instruments, urban critical vehicles...and provocative interactive encounters" that imagine new ways to (un)structure learning and offer meaningful aesthetic experiences for youth and publics (pg. 6). Cultural critics like Claire Bishop (2004; 2012) and Grant Kester (2004; 2011) situate this work historically within community-based and contemporary arts discourse.

They use the terms “participatory art” and “social art practice” interchangeably to generally describe post-studio, visual and collaborative art practices used by artists in museums, schools, public spaces and other settings.

Although participating artists did not identify as teachers or teaching artists exclusively, the socially engaged and participatory nature of their work often takes on a pedagogical dimension. In using pedagogy as a material and medium, the artist expresses a particular intention to influence the experience of someone else and thus shape their subjectivity. There is power bound to this desire for change, affecting the kinds of agency afforded to a public, and the ethical obligation of the social practitioner to make visible their ideological positioning. What’s more, in refusing to formally acknowledge the shifting identity of artist/teacher, this invariably impacts the reflexive capacity and coherence of an artwork and its relationship to the public sphere. This study seeks to understand how social practitioners negotiate this moral responsibility and how this compromises the critical integrity and political potential of social art projects.

Finally, the field of public pedagogy, or learning outside of school offers an opportunity to examine the political and ethical dimensions of these socially engaged practices. In particular, Henry Giroux’s (2000) work around “critical public pedagogy” will provide a useful context to examine issues of power, subjectivity and identity bound to this work. The aim is to critically investigate and critique a re-emerging trend of “social practice”, while making a case for the value of socially engaged practices within the broader context of contemporary art education.

### **Guiding Questions**

- What is a teaching artist, and how do they navigate a complex set of identities as artists, teachers and organizers? How does an artist's cultural upbringing, locational identity and exposure to art discourse affect their subjectivity and political relationship to this work?
- How do artistic collaborations unfold pedagogically and how does art enter into an educative social practice?
- What forms of learning and public pedagogy circulate through the exchange of post-studio, socially engaged or participatory contemporary art projects?
- What are some of the ethical and political concerns surrounding this work, especially related to issues of power and privilege?

### **Why this Study?**

The motivation for this study emerges from a longstanding concern with the neoliberalization of education and a personal passion for experimental art and culture. Over the past decade I have witnessed and collaborated on dozens of art and education projects that offer new ways to provoke critical thought and imagine meaningful participation and aesthetic experience. While some of these projects are well documented, others are disregarded despite their capacity to bring together diverse communities and address a range of relevant socio-cultural issues and challenges.

As compelling and often confrontational gestures, these projects transcend policy change and education reform, offering a new language and set of oppositional practices located in the imaginary and unconscious. Although these practices are bound to

structures of power and privilege, they are philosophically positioned to address and explore “otherness” as an integral element for personal growth and transformation. Today, after years of bearing witness as participant, instigator and facilitator I hope to offer this study as a critical exploration and glimpse into a world that I am both fascinated by and skeptical of.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, the artists selected to participate were chosen based on a pre-existing personal relationship. This afforded an intimate collaboration with each artist, yet also presents a challenge to trustworthiness and criticality of research presented here. Secondly, the sample size is relatively small, but was determined to be manageable considering the constraints of funding and time. Thirdly, all of the artists in this study identify as white, and most come from a privileged background affording them access to higher education in the U.S.

In total, 15 artists and colleagues were contacted to participate but most declined due to scheduling conflicts or disinterest. As such, the findings presented here cannot be directly translated or generalized, offering instead an intimate account of experimental praxis unfolding in the field today. The aim is not to universalize these practices, but rather provide a space to consider participant’s stories and experiences as a meaningful and useful lens to consider the future of art education (Further challenges and a statement of positionality is included in a methodology section in Chapter IV).

### **Organization of Inquiry**

This text is organized into six chapters. Chapter II, “Weather”, explores epistemologies used to inform the analysis and methods of the project. Chapter III: “Ground”, provides a review of literature and background information on the field of art education, teaching artists and public pedagogy. Chapter IV, “The Hunt”, presents an overview of methodology and research process, as well as a statement of positionality. Chapter V, “Spores”, is broken into four portraits that provide a discussion and theoretical analysis of each artist’s practice and selected artworks. Finally, Chapter VI, “Mushroom”, offers concluding analysis and findings from the study, making a number of theoretical connections that draw from the stories, experience and work of each artist. An Appendix provides a list of interview questions, pre-interview survey, focus group script, and consent form.



## CHAPTER II

### WEATHER

For mushrooms weather is where all things begin. The seemingly sporadic surge in mushroom growth is intimately connected to the rain, temperature and humidity of an environment. The slightest change in any condition may delay or signal the growth of an entire mushroom colony. Recently, mushrooms have been discovered to produce their own weather, releasing water vapor to cool the air around by creating convection currents used to spread their spores. The mushroom's fate is bound to the weather, just as our actions in the world are connected to personal ideologies we embrace and those thrust upon us "from above".

In considering the weather as a force that shapes the earth's living systems, Chapter II will explore some of the epistemological frameworks that guide this study and its theoretical positioning. Epistemology is understood here as the ways we come to know or understand things, focusing particularly on relational, feminist and critical approaches. This will include an overview of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome, John Cage's (1961) concept of indeterminacy, Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2005) concept of the learning self, and Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg's (1993) idea of post-formalism among others. The aim is to consider these ideas as an epistemological "weather system" that necessarily changes and connects to the stories explored here.

## **Fungi and Multiple Ways of Knowing**

As we look through the fungus, we learn to see not only multiplicity but also diversities and incipient relations in the landscape more clearly and concretely. Fungi continue to act vitally in the connections that make up landscapes. Human beings' lots are cast with theirs. (Choy et al., 2009, pg. 384)

The earliest known reference to fungi appeared in the writings of Euripides and Hippocrates in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., revealing cautionary tales of mushroom poisoning and speculation on their medicinal properties. For centuries, they were presumed the food of the gods by the Greeks, flowers of the earth by the Michoacan Indians, and were thought to manifest from lightening because they were born without seeds. In the Western world, the fungi kingdom was not formally recognized until 1969 when ethnobotanist Robert Whittaker distinguished fungi from plants. Yet, even after the invention of the microscope, the mapping of DNA, and missions to space, mushrooms continue to evade scientific and rational understanding. With only 5% of the estimated 1.5 million species of fungi identified, scientists are still unable to fully understand how fungi reproduce and live in a mutualistic relationship with almost all other organisms on the planet, including humans.

What we do know about fungi is they are neither plant nor animal. They cannot produce their own food, but rather feed on decaying matter or live in a mutualistic or parasitic relationship with other living organisms. All fungi begin with a spore. In the presence of water, the spore swells as the cell wall expands and is ruptured into a thin expanse known as a protuberance. This elongated tube will eventually become a branch of the spore known as a hypha. As the fungal filaments of hyphae grow, they form a

visible web known as mycelium initiated by the fungi's sexual cycle. This cycle requires the linkage of two filaments or mates of differing genders or mating types, of which there are at 21,000 known kinds of pairings. All the genders however look alike and can only be distinguished by their mating behaviors. Some mushrooms may also be asexual (Money, 2011).

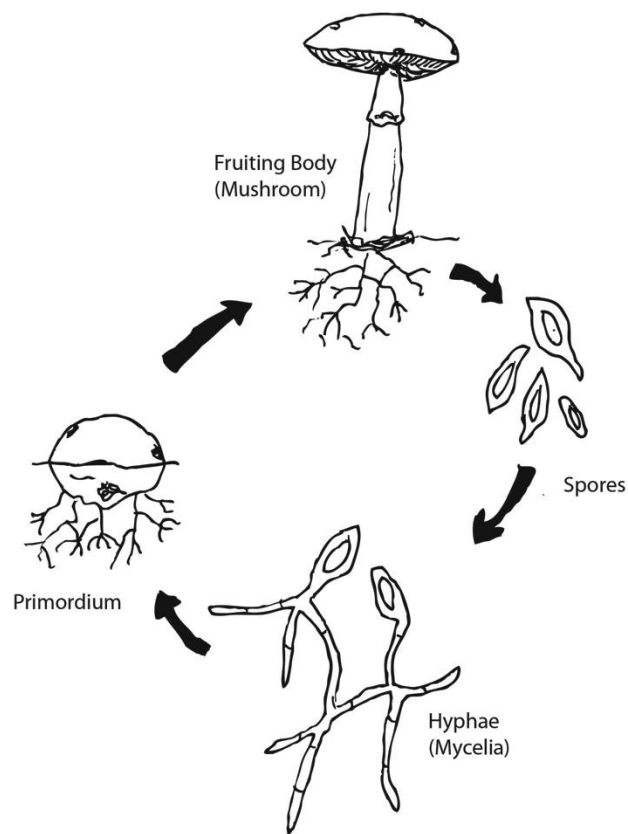
The fusion of filaments in fungal mating at times resembles the dance of a sperm and egg, however two sets of genetic material (chromosomes) do not mix right away. Instead nuclei remain dormant until the fully mature mushroom readies its spores. This leaves the mushrooms genetic potential open to change until the last minute. A combination of moisture, and for some species starvation, prompts the emergence of a fruiting body or what we commonly refer to as a mushroom. As the mushroom begins to fully form, a collection of filaments create a complex and visible flesh known as a primordium, a small protrusion that pierces the soil layer. The small mushroom will grow rapidly from the absorption of water as the cap, stem and gills begin to form.

As the mushroom extends from the primordium, a kind of hydraulic inflation allows the mushroom to form a fleshy tissue. The mushroom's cell walls will loosen and water will pass through osmosis. The cell walls become pressurized and expand, creating pressure that causes the stem to elongate and the cap to expand releasing the gills. In some urban areas, this allows mushrooms to actually push up the sidewalk or create cracks in the pavement.

Eventually as the mushroom matures, the cap expands, and spores are released to prompt the next cycle of fungal growth. Most mushroom colonies feed on nitrogen-rich

materials living for hundreds of years, maintaining healthy soil substrate for an ecosystem. The same individual colony can produce different kinds of mushrooms, and extend its network through the soil to find a source of food until it again fans out in search of another nutrient deposit. As the mushroom dries out, it decomposes into the same soil from which it emerged.

**Figure 1. Mushroom Life Cycle**



The largest species and currently the world champion for largest organism on the planet is a colony of *armillaria ostoyae*, or honey mushrooms, found in the Malheur National Forest in Oregon measuring 2,400 acres in diameter. The fungus uses

rhizomorphs, a collection of root-like structures emerging from the hyphae to form networks that work in a cooperative fashion to funnel water and nutrients for continued growth. These colonies of hyphae spawn from a single spore, yet a colony is only born when this spore contains two nuclei or a dikaryon from which a fungus develops.

All human bodies are hosts for fungi. They exist in between your toes and fingers, in your skin and elsewhere. They are found on all continents, in all ecosystems, underwater, in caves, and below your very feet right now. We all share a connection to fungi, and yet their growth and behavior continue to evade scientific and rational explanation. In the mystery and networked complexity of fungi, they provide a context to consider relational and uncertain ways of knowing. A number of feminist scholars including Carol Gilligan (1982) and Mary Field Belenky (1986) have explored this concept, explaining there are no absolute Truths, but rather multiple ways of “knowing” which unfold in our experience and participation with the world.

Mushrooms offer a metaphor and material to visualize this concept. The physical architecture of mycelium for instance is a salient way to understand and depict the complex interactions between social, cultural and political forces. What’s more the ecological behaviour of mushrooms, which operate in both a mutualistic and parasitic relationship with other organisms provides a biological metaphor for how we interact with others and create knowledge from our experiences. Each mushroom is also unique, and yet their spores and mycelia web are connected to a vast unseen network that can span miles in either direction. As both an individual and collective entity, fungi offer the earth’s biosphere an array of services that help regulate its rhythm and energetic

transformation. Mycologist Paul Stamets (2005) describes this as “a sentient cellular network”, referring to fungi as “Earth’s natural Internet, a consciousness with which we might be able to communicate...” (pg. 7).

Within the context of this study, mushrooms provide a conceptual tool for complicating and understanding the work of Woolard, Peterson, Clark and Thornton theoretically through a critical, feminist and post-formal lens. Methodologically, the practice of mushroom hunting provides a physical material to (un)structure conversations with each artist, while decentering a western approach to research. Finally, this inquiry is not so much interested in the scientific study of fungi, but rather in a metaphoric understanding of mushrooms as an indeterminate, mysterious and networked organism. As such, they provide a touchstone and inspiration for the work presented here.

### **Critical Theory**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a group of intellectuals including Max Horkheimer (1937), Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno (1945), and later Jürgen Habermas (1962) began to critique accepted social theory and offer an alternative discourse. The group known as the Frankfurt School started the Institute for Social Research responding largely to the spread of capitalism, and exploring re-interpretations of both Marx (1867) and Freud’s (1938) concepts of social science and psychoanalysis. They were interested in finding dynamic and relational models to improve an understanding of human society, while respecting its situated context and historical contingency. Members of the school rejected Kantian and Cartesian principles of objectivity and positivist rationality claiming these systems were oppressive in how they

“treat active human beings as mere facts and objects within a scheme of mechanical determinism...” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1945, pg. 15).

Horkheimer and his contemporaries were more interested in the unison of different approaches, while providing a critique of class structure and bourgeois ideology. Critical theorists argued for an understanding of our lived experience in the context of social structures, signs and symbols that oppress certain groups of people based on race, class, gender and other systems of difference. Horkheimer explains:

Critical theory rejects the procedure of determining objective facts with the aid of conceptual systems, from a purely external standpoint, and claims that ‘the facts, as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic in the same degree as they are for the savant...critical thinking...is motivated today by the effort really to transcend tension and to abolish opposition between the individual’s purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built. (Horkheimer, 1937, pp. 209-210)

With its roots initially in textual analysis and hermeneutics, Adorno and Marcuse expanded this to include a critique of technology and scientific rationality. They saw science and its reaches into the everyday lives of people as dangerous and potentially catastrophic. Later on, critical theorists like Habermas (1962) presented an interpretive and interactionist view of language and its connection to power and control in what he termed the “public sphere”.

In the 1960s a feminist critique of critical theory considered social constructs like gender and sexual identity within an understanding of patriarchy as a social system that protects the privilege of men by devaluing or dismissing the experience and interests of woman as a group (Wood, 1997). Feminist scholars argue for multiple ways of knowing,

resisting any kind of positivist truth and understanding feminine was of knowing as distinct from a masculine conception (Belenky et al., 1986).

Today critical theory is used in a variety of contexts, including the institution of education where a number of scholars have developed ideas and theories that draw from the concept of critical pedagogy. Similar to the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, scholars like Henry Giroux (2000, 2001, 2006), Joe Kincheloe (1997), Paulo Freire (1975) and others use critical theory to connect pedagogy and education to issues of power. Critical pedagogy is imagined as a tool to decode, provoke and respond to issues of social inequity and struggle in and outside of schooling contexts. Giroux (2006) explains this as a “critical practice” that should address issues of human agency, critical thought and democratic participation:

Pedagogy as a critical practice should provide...the knowledge, skills, and culture of questioning necessary for students to engage in critical dialogue with the past, question authority (whether sacred or secular) and its effects, struggle with ongoing relations of power, and prepare themselves for what it means to be critical, active citizens in the interrelated local, national, and global public spheres. (pg. 28)

### **The Learning Self**

Scholars and practitioners in field of education have spent an inordinate amount of time attempting to quantify how and why we learn. In the 1950's, Jean Piaget (1954) began to develop a constructivist notion of learning, understanding learning in the context of our interaction and experience in the world. Albert Bandura (1986) and Lev Vygotsky (1978), later expanded Piaget's work to consider social and cultural contexts within this understanding of learning. More recently, scholars like Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger



(1991) have integrated many of these ideas into a theory of situated learning, where they argue:

...learning is recognized as a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world, through legitimate peripheral participation in ongoing social practice... (pg. 4)

For Lave and Wenger, learning is concerned with our daily interactions and the ways we negotiate meaning from our participation in the world. They describe this as a process of social co-participation that occurs between a learner (or newcomer), and a member of a community of practice (or old timer). This unfolds as a process of “legitimate peripheral participation”, through experience and social engagement as one becomes a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. Lave and Wegner argue that we limit learning when access to participating in a community of practice is restricted. While Lave and Wegner’s conception of situated learning is useful, it is still a structural notion of learning that reduces social transactions amongst groups of people in ways that ignore issues of power linked to the construction of class, race, and gender.

Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) in her book, *Places of Learning*, provides a feminist perspective, describing learning as something emergent, contingent, relational and processual. Ellsworth explains learning is not merely the transmission of a pre-determined set of knowledge, but rather located in our lived experience and somatic participation with the world, something she calls the *learning self*. Here the body, brain and mind align as a synchronous force, founded in a pre-linguistic way of making sense

in the world. The binaries of object/subject, of pure sensorial experience, and individual intellect are redirected as contiguities and interrelated components of the same whole.

While education and schooling focus on our cognitive ability measured through forms of memorization, compliance and testing, Ellsworth explains the experience of learning has little to do with compliance, but rather is something in transition. This involves previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world that include affect, emotion, subjectivity, and our connection to the body. As we experience and engage with self and other, “knowings” arise from our physical encounters and somatic response, which contain their own “unknowable authenticity”. Evan Thompson (2007) describes this as a process of “enaction”, explaining:

...living beings are autonomous agents...that enact and bring forth their own cognitive domains;...The nervous system does not process information in the computational sense, but creates meaning....skillful knowhow in situated and embodied actions... a relational domain enacted or brought forth by that being’s autonomous agency... (pg. 51)

Ellsworth (2005) in particular is interested in exploring sites, events and experiences that allow educators and people to experiment with this expanded idea of learning, something she calls an “experimental pragmatism of becoming” (pg. 7). The act of teaching in this sense is not the transaction of pre-existing knowledge from an expert to a learner, but is a self-motivated exchange founded in shared and autonomous experience. Pedagogy then becomes a vehicle, an opening or passage that invites one toward new and uncertain experiences, which allows us to discover and embrace the

unknown. This in many ways is analogous to the practice of unschooling, but exists more as a primal force of intuition.

To fully embrace the learning self as a mode of being, Ellsworth argues one must withdraw from an individualized idea of self. This is a field of emergence implicated in socio-political contexts, identity, and issues of power. Artists are often adept at facilitating these experiences, yet Ellsworth warns an aesthetic experience is simply one component of learning, not given to us by an artist, but rather co-constructed in the knowing extended through sensation and cognition. The relationship between aesthetic experience and the experience of the learning self makes the partnership of art and education uneasy and yet invaluable. This is because art takes on the burden of trying to make shareable a knowing that cannot be explained. For Ellsworth, pedagogy is a confrontation, a critical vehicle for moving one's body and self to a new understanding and arrangement of the world, beyond representation, and an awareness of our interpenetrative selves.

### **Navigating Relationships between Education and Learning**

Although we are always engaged in a process of learning through our experiences in the world, not all learning is a form of education. Epistemologically, the practice of education often seeks to create knowledge for a particular purpose, determined by a student or teacher's desire and intention. Here the aim of education is not just facilitating a set of experiences, but also actively constructing knowledge through a curriculum that may take the form of a text, a physical space or public discourse. Education in this sense provides a structure through which students enter into dialogue with self and others about

the issue and context brought forth through this curriculum and one's subjective experience.

Education is also an institution that has a particular agenda and aim to reify social structures that produce and negotiate power. The ways in which a teacher frames education and facilitates the construction of knowledge is something philosophers and pedagogues have debated for centuries. Thinkers like Paulo Friere (1977) argue education should be a practice of freedom, allowing students to become active participants and not just passive consumers in how they understand and negotiate meaning in the world. The aim is to cultivate a space for critical awareness that may not otherwise emerge without a teacher offering this opportunity or providing a set of tools to engage this process.

The idea of art education, as we will explore in Chapter III presents a unique challenge to understanding the synchronicities between education and learning. In many respects education is used to codify and formalize art as a set of proficiencies to master, yet also provides an opportunity for students to gain skills in expressing an understanding of the world and creating knowledge about it. In making art or working through an art process we may engage in a process of learning that is individual and perhaps deviates from a teacher's vision. Education then offers a framework to contextualize learning and provide access to skills, techniques and knowledge that may not be available to everyone.

In the works explored in this study, education and learning push against each other in different ways. In Woolard's *Trade School* project, a school premised on barter for instruction, education is used as an art material and framework for learning to unfold between participants. Education is understood here as a structure or conduit for people to

meet, to exchange ideas and skills. The open workshop format provides a recognizable platform for education on a range of issues – bee keeping, carpentry, graphic design, yoga - while learning may occur more rhizomatically through one's personal experience or intimate engagement during a session. As relationships are formed between *Trade School* participants, there is also a potential for learning to continue through barter and further collaborations. The project is also an active critique of education, re-scripting the means by which knowledge is shared and thus further complicating the relationships between formal education and learning. The use of the term “school” for instance references a particular association with the institution of education, yet offers a space for artists and non-artist to experiment and play with what this institutional form can and should be.

Especially in the context of socially engaged art practices and projects, there is a need to understand the pedagogical drive and educational desire to facilitate learning for a group of people in relationship to a place and context. Without due reflection, an artist may attempt to transpose an educational form or structure onto a space without thinking about how a process of learning is framed. This is an ongoing and tenuous negotiation that artists have to consider ontologically in the conception of projects that involve people and some pedagogical intention. An audience may need more than an informational session, lecture or text to enter into dialogue with an artwork, while keeping things too open-ended may not offer enough guidance for the work to fully engage the creation of knowledge amongst the group or individually.

Education is thus a necessary component for the kinds of learning activated through a socially engaged work, providing a coherent framework and context for oppositional pedagogical practices to circulate. This informs the political potential of education as a platform for change, and yet a structure of power that maintains a status quo. In many ways, artists in this study offer critiques of education as art projects, attempting to coopt the form of school and context of learning as a medium for art making. These examples provide a glimpse into the nuanced relationships between education and learning that unfold through aesthetic experience and how knowledge is created through these works.

### **Rhizome: An Epistemology of Becoming**

In the 1970s and 80s philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari began to collaborate on a number of post-structural critiques of psychoanalytic theory and postmodernism, co-authoring *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Appearing initially as the introduction to the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari developed the concept of a “rhizome” to critique and explore Cartesian and postmodern ideas of power and domination. Their central argument revolves around a critique of what they refer to as “the root-book”, a metaphor for the “arborescent” tree, which is a symbol used throughout history to structure the idea of knowledge and power. Popular metaphors like the “tree of knowledge” and “the tree of life” are examples, organized hierarchically with the branches representing different ideas or disciplines connected to a singular root structure.

Deleuze and Guattari admit readily they are tired of this tree metaphor and its continued reliance on binary logic where knowledge is arranged as a pyramid of power.

As a counter device, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) introduce the idea of a rhizome as a non-hierarchical form that subverts and resists the root-tree structure. Devin Heckman (2002) explains:

A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pg. 7). Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (pg. 25). The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation. (Heckman, 2002, para. 4)

Deleuze and Guattari describe a rhizome as a “multiplicity of assemblages”, where an assemblage consists of “lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification” (pg. 3). The lines may correspond for instance to different forms of social power, desire, or structures of domination that comprise a collection of entry points and exits of the rhizome. The lines that extend and recede from these assemblages are a “multiplicity”, an ontological organism that resists any relation to an Absolute subject or an object. As time and space unfold, a rhizome may be ruptured and new lines of deterritorialization form, which can always be reconstituted providing power to the signifier again. The rhizome itself spreads like the surface of water, or a “patch of oil”, evolving from underground flows, along crevices and valleys.

The rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) warn us, cannot be used as a generative model or structure, but rather a “map, open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification...” (pg. 12). Yet, they explain this is not to be confused with the idea of tracings on a map, where dualities and codified ways of being can emerge. Rather, the rhizome offers a different orientation of zones that are indeterminate, unforeseen and uncertain, “deterritorializing” relations outside of established identities.

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of a rhizome is purposefully abstract. It is not intended as a totalizing critique of postmodernity, but rather another way to approach the critique altogether by increasing connections and possibilities not already given. This is one of the central elements to their empiricist pragmatism, offering not an instrumental notion of how to approach philosophy, but suggesting rather that uncertainty and ambiguity “accompany most forms of organization, and that thinking has a peculiar relation to them” (Rajchman, 2000, pg. 5). Philosophy is conceived of here as something in the making, not a process of interpretation, judgment or perception purely. The great crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Deleuze and Guattari is not just the idea of representation and language as Foucault might argue, but rather a problem of subjectivity founded in clichés. Thus they reject the idea of some kind of rational subject and instead understand subjects as having multiple and shifting identities.

While Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy may be ahead of its time in some respects, it offers an epistemological lens to confront Cartesian and rational ways of thinking and “knowing” the world. The rhizome as a concept helps us reconsider



situations and ideas in an unstructured and relational framework that considers the shifting and contingent nature of knowledge and practice. This offers a means to confront assumptions, and contextualize arguments as a relationship between ideas, actions and beliefs. In many ways we can consider this an “epistemology of becoming”, a means to understand knowledge as something in the making. For the purposes of this study, the idea of a rhizome provides a philosophical context to consider mushrooms as not just a physical organism but also a conceptual device for critical and post-formal inquiry. This invites unseen connections, ambiguities and uncertainty into the process and form of research.

### **Indeterminacy and John Cage**

The mushroom is his icon; its whimsical freedom is everywhere. “Accepting chance,” says the mycologist Mr. Cage, “makes prejudices, pre-conceived ideas, and previous ideas of order and organization disappear.” Taking the mushroom as his model, he is “imitating Nature in her manner of operation - random and free. (Rothstein, 1981)

Fungi are connected intimately to the work and life of artist John Cage, who became a mushroom enthusiast early on in his career as a composer, teacher and experimental musician. In the 1930s, Cage studied musical composition under Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg who were known for their radical approaches to music. However, Cage found himself more attracted to Eastern ideas of music and philosophy, favoring a chaotic and experimental idea of sound and music. He began to study Zen Buddhism and Indian culture at Columbia University in New York, and in the 1950’s met Japanese thinker Daisetz T. Suzuki. Cage attended several of his lectures, attuned in

particular to a session on ego and the outside world, which he used to solidify many of his early notions of noise and chance-based compositions (Larson, 2012).

As Cage entered the New York art scene, he became less interested in creating something new, or avant-garde, but rather entranced by the idea and experience of silence itself. Cage would call this “condition ‘zero’, similar to the Buddhist notion of shunyata, which Suzuki (1965) characterized as the ‘Absolute Void’” (FERENCE, 2012, pg. 45). Here Cage became interested in translating this into music, developing a theory of indeterminacy and chance composition. Cage used this to expand the form, material and method of music and sound in his compositions, explaining any musical “form unvitalized by spontaneity brings about the death of all the other elements of the work” (1961, pg. 73).

A composition as Cage explains, comes to life if the form is uncontrolled by a conventional structure and method. Indeterminate compositions demand an absence of hierarchy, no sounds are more important than any other. In the context of a performance for example there is no beginning or end. Rather, the sounds of the environment, the room or space in which the music is being formed become an integral part of the composition itself. Richard Kostelanetz (1992) also notes, “indeterminacy differs from improvisation, because indeterminacy incorporates imaginative constraints” (pg. 4).

In one of Cage’s well-known works, *4’33”*, a pianist is instructed to remain silent for the duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. When performed at Carnegie Hall, the sounds of the audience, and of New York City became the music of the composition. In other works, Cage uses certain structures to insert a chance variation

using texts like the *I-Ching (Book of Changes)*, an ancient Chinese system of divination that interprets oracular statements. Cage used similar techniques to structure, or perhaps “unstructure” his musical compositions and later “mesostic” poetry. One of his more well known compositions, “Imaginary Landscape No. 4” for instance, involved 24 performers and 12 radios that were all tuned to different frequencies. Cage described this not as “a landscape in the future...to take you off the ground and go like Alice through the looking glass” (Cage, 1963, pg. 45).

Cage’s works were also collaborative, often working with pianist David Tudor and choreographer Merce Cunningham. The idea of an indeterminate composition allowed each contributor to work both individually and collectively in response to each other through habits they were already accustomed to. Cage explains this occurs in the same way you might read a newspaper, jumping around from article to article while having breakfast, distracted by conversation, reading aloud, or answering the phone, all at the same time. When asked during a formal reception at the Guggenheim, “what then is your final goal?”, Cage (1992) responded:

I did not see that we were going to a goal, but that we were living in process, and that that process is eternal...My intention in putting the stories together was to suggest that all things - stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and by extension, beings - are related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person’s mind. (pg. 6)

In the 1940s, Cage lived with a group of artists in Stony Point, New York where he would go walking out in the woods to find moments of solitude. The area was flush with mushrooms and near well-known mycologist Guy Nearing. Nearing became Cage’s

“mushroom guru” as he honed an interest in wild edibles and mushroom foraging. While living in New York City in the late 1950s, Cage was asked to teach a musical composition class at the New School for Social Research. Rather than offer a traditional music class, Cage asked if he could lead a series of five mushroom hunting field trips with Nearing as a collaborator:

This summer I’m going to give a class in mushroom identification at the New School for Social Research. Actually, it’s five field trips, not really a class at all. However, when I proposed it to Dean Clara Mayer, though she was delighted with the idea, she said, “I’ll have to let you know later whether or not we’ll give it.” So she spoke to the president who couldn’t see why there should be a class in mushrooms at the New School. Next she spoke to Professor MacIvor who lives in Piermont. She said, “What do you think about our having a mushroom class at the New School?” He said, “Fine idea. Nothing more than mushroom identification develops the powers of observation.” (Cage, 1961, pg. 23)

For Cage, mushrooms were a way to develop one’s “powers of audition”, to listen deeply, and become fully present in a situation or environment. Cage’s course at the New School prompted a revival of the New York Mycological Society, of which Cage was a leader for a short time. His expeditions into the woods became popular, describing them as “a fairly unorganized anarchic situation that would allow for pleasant days in the woods” (Cage, 1961, pg. 24). These informal sessions provided an opportunity for experimental artists in New York City to gather, including Jackson Mac Low, La Monte Young, George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins and George Maciunas among others. In 1957, founding member of Fluxus George Brecht and artist Allen Kaprow accompanied

Cage on a mushroom hunt. At that time Kaprow was still a student, struggling with sound-related elements in his work and began to study under Cage. Influenced by his experimental approach to “composition”, Kaprow began to develop situational events that he called “happenings”, re-positioning the idea of performance art in the 1960s.

Cage’s work at the New School was instrumental in the development of the Fluxus art movement, which was a response to the institutionalization of art and its rationalist idea of beauty and capitalism. Fluxus was by no means a cohesive movement, but rather a loose network of ideas and people with the intent of expanding art to include notions of experience, embodied perception and interaction with everyday and imaginary worlds. They rejected the notion of conceptual or abstract art, and championed ideas of anti-art and culture in a constant state flux. The underlying aim of Fluxus was rooted in a phenomenological understanding of art experience (Higgins, 2002). Fluxus member Dick Higgins for instance used the term “intermedia” to provide a framework for understanding how discrete art disciplines could cross boundaries and thresholds.

The mushroom hunt was perhaps Cage’s way of accessing this expanded idea of art, using the experience of walking in the woods to hone an awareness of something greater than just sound, but to our relationship to everything else. For the purposes of this study, John Cage’s philosophical notion of indeterminacy and his use of mushroom hunting provide a vital inspiration. In many ways, John Cage continues to motivate my own personal love of mushrooms and an understanding of the mushroom hunt as a vehicle for inflection and critical dialogue. In entering the woods with the intention of scanning the forest carefully, we move toward a meditative and contemplative state that

allows us to look outside ourselves and to consider the unseen and uncertain dimensions of the world and our unconscious. The mushroom hunts organized with each artist are a purposive reference to Cage's work, using this to engage critically while offering an embodied and indeterminate experience in each case.

### **Art and Chaos**

Art has always been a complex term and concept. From cave paintings, to tea ceremonies, dances, and elaborate ritual performance, art precedes from a primordial and sensory realm without language. This makes writing and talking about art a complicated endeavor because it will inevitably be bound to the limitations of language and representation. Modern, postmodern and contemporary thinkers from Kant to Descartes, Plato to Aristotle, have attempted to define and understand art as an object and a subject, a concept and philosophy, as a practice and method. Terms such as aesthetic, beauty, taste, creativity and imagination attempt to provide a form, history and coherence to this understanding. While this may appear salient in some cases, the epistemological desire to locate art within and around a discrete concept or meaning can be dangerous.

Elizabeth Grosz (2008) addresses some of these concerns in her book *Art and Chaos*, drawing from the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1980; 1987) to develop what she calls a “nonaesthetic philosophy of art”. For Grosz, art “enables matter to become expressive, to not just satisfy but also to intensify...and become more than itself” (pg. 4). She explains art in the context of a provocation that is embodied through sensations, affects, intensities and rhythms that motivate “becomings” and self-transformations. Art begins with chaos, which she describes as a series of indeterminate and unpredictable

movements and situations that occur in our field of experience. As we receive a particular sensation, we gain some autonomy from the origin of our perception, and thus gain awareness of our being in the world.

Yet Grosz asserts chaos does have its own set of structures that diverge and evolve. What art “does” is extract pieces of chaos to form its own set of orders received as sensory experiences. This is described as a kind of disruption in a particular plane of composition, a field where movements and territories are formed. The artistic release creates a sensory rhythm that resonates in relation to a place and its order of things through the body and unconscious mind. Deleuze and Guattari (1990) explain art can only emanate from this “conjunction of a territory”, or the creation of boundaries within one’s environment where a temporal history and particular ascription to time and space is created. Art is then a process of deterritorialization, enabling both individual and collective opportunities for sensation to transport the body/mind from a particular origin and territory to new “becomings” and arrangements of the world.

Art for the purposes of this project does not refer to a set of specific practices or methods used by artists, but is rather a way of being in the world. This grounds the “idea of art” in particular events motivated by individual and collective bodies rather than merely a material object or form. This frees us from the constrictions of identifying what is and what is not art, what is good or bad art. It rather refocuses our attention on transformative experiences in the everyday that motivate new understandings and states of awareness that are uncertain and uncomfortable. The creation and experience of art is

an inherently pedagogical process as Dennis Atkinson (2009) points out, because it produces a set of meanings both individually and collectively through this process.

While a number of terms including socially engaged, participatory and post-studio art are used throughout the text, there is no specific definition of art used to generalize these practices. Art is understood rather as a sensory experience, a pedagogical activity and form of unconscious meaning making that unfolds through our participation with and through the world. This allows us to move beyond an idea of art as an object, and to examine the institution of art within a western and positivist history that complicates the ethical and political dimensions of art experience and making.

Yet what does art actually do and how does it operate phenomenologically? Dewey would argue experience is what is produced through our interaction with an artwork, whether a discrete object or performance. Art experience is different for each individual, typically involving a collection of physical, psychological and cognitive processes among others. In the symbolic realm, scholars in visual culture explain art produces signs for us to interpret and read (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). However, art is also situated in the material world, artists producing functional objects, sculptures or even entire landscapes to convey an idea, while some artists seek provocation or dialogue with a viewer to move them to a new state of awareness or consciousness.

Thornton for instance uses performance art to provoke conversation about issues of debt, security or beauty. In a number of works inside museums, bank lobbies and public spaces she uses dance and movement with groups of people to achieve this. A recent project called *Physical Audit* asked a group of dancers to re-interpret bank lobbies



by placing their hands on surfaces to gather evidence that the bank is really just made of people. The group moves through the space collectively, and then individually, wiping their hands on the ATM, the floor, on fake plants and then deposits a small sum in a collective bank account. Thornton creates physical artifacts from this performance, records video, and choreographs a dance as a form of creative resistance.

As a witness to this performance I may for instance enter the ATM or bank lobby with the intention of getting some cash, but instead encounter something unfamiliar to my everyday experience. I see a group of dancers moving around the space, moving randomly and engaging in actions that may seem odd or out of place. Here there is a kind of disruption with the familiar, prompting me to re-evaluate my relationship to the space and the people around me. I may be simply agitated and leave, I may ask what's going on, I may join the group in responding to the space or simply begin to think about how banks could be theaters. As a direct participant in this activity, my experience of art will be different. I take on a political role as a participant and engage in a form of institutional critique. There is a degree of risk and resistance associated with this. The bank security could easily call the police, forcibly eject me, or fine me for trespassing. In framing the act as performance art, the value of my movements, my agency and presence in the space changes accordingly.

In other instances, art may operate more subtly. We may encounter a painting that makes us smile, a sculpture that confuses us, or a theatrical performance that brings us to tears. Art cultivates a space for us to become vulnerable and for us to imagine something outside of ourselves. For many artists, especially those who reject a formal interpretation

believe art is a process of living one's life with creative intention. Allan Kaprow's happenings or the Situationist notion of psychogeography is premised on the idea of interrupting the everyday patterns and routines of a society by empowering the viewer to participate or reframe how they interact and occupy spaces. Art operates here as a loose structure for participation that may deviate from an accepted socio-cultural script.

Art is also a market force, a form of economic and cultural capital mediated by those with privilege and social status. As art objects and experiences are exchanged for money, art operates as a currency that is policed by cultural critics, institutions and wealthy collectors. Art in this sense produces a set of commodities that have symbolic value and power used to gain access to spaces and influence certain discourses. This trickles down into media outlets where art is used to sell and communicate ideas. Today, we consume and experience art as popular culture through billboards, television, radio and the internet, producing the physical environment and visual landscape that we come to accept as reality.

Although some art is purposefully ambiguous, most artists seek to express a primordial feeling that may be difficult to communicate in words alone. As a shared or individual experience, art attempts to reframe popular myths or symbols, to tell stories in new ways, or simply provoke more questions or frustrations. The key to understanding what art "does" is not to assume or privilege a particular modality of aesthetic experience, but to rather consider the multiple ways that we interface with art in the everyday and how this affects our mind, body and soul.

### **Post-Formal Thinking and Creativity**

The work of scholars Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (1993) explore a number of key issues in education using critical and feminist theory to address the shortcomings of educational psychology and cognitive theory. Together they developed a theory of “post-formal thinking” to critique a mechanistic worldview and Piagetian approach to learning. Like critical pedagogy, post-formal thinking is imagined as a tool for reconsidering knowledge and learning in relationship to power and socio-cultural contexts. As Kincheloe and Steinberg explain, this involves the production of subjective knowledge in both the teacher and student, while recognizing the ambiguity of subjectivity itself. To approach this, they critique a set of modernist assumptions concerning intelligence and sophisticated thinking, offering an expanded idea of learning and multiple ways of knowing.

The post-formal thinker, Kincheloe and Steinberg argue, explores the “eplicate” and “implicate” orders of the world. The idea of eplicate involving simple patterns or ideas that repeat themselves in some kind of notable frequency, and the implicate focused more on the “larger unified structures” that unfold through our participation and experience in the world. These two mechanisms are not in opposition to each other, but are rather entangled. Post-formal thinking in this sense shares a number of connections to Paulo Freire’s (1970) idea of conscientization, or being aware of how socio-cultural and political systems shape and inform our worldview.

Post-formal thinking also requires “metaphoric cognition”, introducing students to “modes of being and acting in the world that are new to his or her experience” (pg. 64).

This may involve an awareness and use of subjugated knowledges to develop empathy and the skills necessary to analyze structures of oppression. Here the world is considered as a holistic and context-saturated text to be read where the notion of place and particularity help to uncover the role that power plays in shaping the world around us.

Leila Villaverde (1999) uses Kincheloe and Steinberg's idea of post-formal thinking to re-situate concepts of art, creativity and aesthetics. For Villaverde, creativity is an ongoing and dynamic process of meaning making, thought and action rooted in our emotional, unconscious and historical engagement with the world. She explains, creativity is often conflated with art and vice versa. Here the notion of creativity is still bound to essentialist and formal notions of progress, innovation and creating new "knowledge objects". She explains the arts have similarly been reduced to a transmission of skills and techniques limited to those who exhibit a proficient talent and intelligence to be an "artist". The privileging of who can and cannot be an artist is something Villaverde points to as important in understanding creativity theoretically. In creating systems, quantifications or measurable rubrics to define what and who an artist is, this diminishes the value and potential for creativity to inhabit the uncertain and unknown.

Creativity as Villaverde (1999) explains is an unfolding process of:

...recognizing patterns, taking risks, challenging assumptions...allowing oneself to reach that point of accepting something new, a fluidity between outside and inside [which is a] necessary exchange between the individual and society. (pg. 177)

Within a post-formal framework, this necessitates a "critical constructivism" that allows teachers and students to relocate their worldview, and understand the ways dominant

symbols and signs create systems of power and oppression. This new awareness can provide a space to rethink and decenter our relationship with an artwork and self.

Villaverde suggests this opens up a fourth dimension that allows one to delve deep into unconscious possibilities and new discourses. She likens this process to Carl Jung's (1964) notion of "self actualization", a kind of third person narratization that enables a hybrid identity to transgress and relocate borders and seemingly fixed structures within society. This includes our emotional, and unconscious dream worlds that offer "tangible exploratory experiences into underlying ideologies of what we see, feel and do" (Villaverde, 1999, pg. 187). Schooling often excludes or limits these kinds of experiences because it is already implicated in a formal system of rational thought and reasoning that assumes answers can be found to all questions. Post-formal teachers instead use their power in the classroom to open up spaces of possibilities, to provide a pedagogy that engages the individual in creative experiences, which are embodied and meaningful.

## CHAPTER III

### GROUND

The soil is a composite of history, a core sample of energetic transformation. In each gram of healthy soil, there are thousands of microorganisms teeming with life. The soil acts as a connector to everything else, a vital life force along which mycelia webs extend and retreat. As fungi and human bodies return to the ground, the soil is infused with nutrients for other organisms to draw life and begin again. Using the soil or “ground” as conceptual touchstone, Chapter III will provide a review of literature focused on contemporary art education, social art practice, and public pedagogy. This will provide a theoretical “grounding” for research findings presented in Chapter V and VI.

The first section will explore some of the historical and contemporary philosophies and movements in art education, particularly in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The next section will provide an overview of social and participatory art practice, drawing from the work of Grant Kester (1995), Claire Bishop (2012), Jacques Ranciere (2004, 2010) and others to offer both a historical and theoretical exploration of a renewed interest in collaborative and participatory art practices. A concluding section offers an understanding of public pedagogy and the public sphere using the works of Sandlin (2008, 2010), Habermas (1962), and Giroux (2001, 2000) among others.

## **Art Education and Teaching Artists**

### **A Brief History of Art Education**

The history of art education is intimately woven within political and social movements throughout time. The Greco-Roman period for instance, contains some of the first written and oral records of art education in the works of Plato and Aristotle. They organized the four branches of education into writing, gymnastics, music and drawing, developing a formal and Western understanding of beauty and taste. As The Middle Ages progressed, the emergence of craft guilds and apprenticeship became a way to share expertise in art skill and craft. Religion and the spread of Christianity were also a central theme in both the production of artworks and the development of patronage systems at this time.

As the modern world emerged, the floodgates of industrialization in Europe and the United States re-introduced the art of drawing for boys and the ornamental arts for girls. Drawing in particular was included in the curriculum of “common schools” in the United States, considered a means to promote moral standards from a wave of immigrants that arrived at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1880s, the first record of teaching artists in the United States appeared in Jane Adam’s Hull House Settlement in Chicago, where artists were hired to run a variety of art, music, dance, and theater programs. Adams saw the arts as essential to weaving the fabric of strong communities and believed that learning through art cultivates the agency and voice required to participate in a democratic society.

Around the same time, the progressive education movement led by John Dewey began to inspire a host of expanded arts education offerings. After World War II, a number of studies and projects sought to legitimize the need for art in the classroom. Victor D'Amico created the first educational curriculum for the Museum of Modern Art in the mid 1940s, inspired in part by Dewey's (1934) *Art as Experience*. D'Amico believed that educators should teach children to become more aware of their own experiences and that such experiences should serve as inspiration for works of art (University of North Texas, 2013).

The 1950's paved the way for an Arts in Education Movement, where educators sought a more integrated approach to art in the classroom. In 1959, the Ford Foundation launched the first Composer in the Schools program, which created three-year residencies for composers like Philip Glass in schools (Booth, 2010). This marks a pivotal moment in the development and role of the teaching artist, defined loosely by foundations like the Getty as an individual who maintains an art practice but is also engaged in the act of teaching about art. In 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts allocates funding for the first national Artists in School Program, inviting artists to stage performances, events and demonstrations around the country.

The counterculture of the 1960s opened up new possibilities for teaching artists to work with schools, encouraging experiments like The University City Project in St. Louis (1968-71) and Allen Kaprow's Project Other Ways (1969) in Berkeley, CA. Unfortunately, the economic crisis of the 1970s, in addition to declining test scores and graduation rates, prompted public pressure for more accountability in education. Major



urban centers like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles lay off most of the arts education workforce, leaving non-profit foundations like the Getty, Lincoln Center Institute, and the Rockefeller Foundation to fill in the gaps. As austerity measures and budget reforms continued into the 1980s, many arts education programs were eroded.

Around the same time, educators and policy makers shifted their focus away from curriculum content to the development of assessment tools, as competency-based teacher education expanded across the nation (Efland, 1990). From this movement, a set of national assessment rubrics are created to measure student's performance in drawing and design, as well as attitudes and behaviors towards art. However, thinkers like Maxine Greene (1978), Howard Gardner and Laura Chapman (1982) voiced their dissent, championing ideas of arts integration and placing emphasis on the need for creative critical thinking, imagination, and art as experience.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, the debate over how to best implement arts education, and whether it is necessary at all was debated amidst further reforms linked to performance accountability and high-stakes testing. Today, the effects of this "excellence reform movement" have further marginalized access to art education in the classroom (Engebretsen, K. & Van Fleet, E., 2013; Coopersmith, J., Parsad, B., Spiegelman, M., 2012). A review of qualitative and quantitative research from the U.S. Department of Education (2012) for instance maps an overall decline of art in the classroom that began in the late 1960s. They note, this decline is most prevalent in African American and Latino(a) youth who are often denied access to arts programs because of an inequitable distribution of funding in urban school districts among other reasons.

A report analyzing the 2008 National Endowment for the Arts survey of participation in the arts points out school district officials around the U.S. found an overall decrease in instructional time for art and music in public schools:

...since 2002, 16 percent of the nation's school districts that had decreased instructional time in subjects other than English-language arts and mathematics had reduced instructional time in art and music by an average of nearly an hour a week. (Hedberg & Rabkin, 2011)

In response to these declines, a flurry of reports and independent research from the Americans for the Arts (2013), and other non-profits are being used to lobby for more art education nationwide. A majority of these studies argue for arts as a job creator that increases academic performance, lowers drop out rates, and helps low-income students of color out of poverty. While these arguments may prove useful in some cases, they place a burden on art education to deliver consistent quantifiable outcomes that are difficult to achieve and cannot be universally adapted to all schools or situations. If art is not proven to create jobs or improve test scores, it is then easily discredited as irrelevant or unessential according to these expectations and demands from both lobbyists and school administrators (Hetland et al., 2007).

Issues of race, class and gender are closely linked to this debate as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In the U.S. in particular, widening wealth gaps place already marginalized communities of color at a distinct disadvantage as federal programs like *Race to the Top* continue to place pressure on school districts to relocate monies away from arts and cultural programming and toward test prep and readiness. While some states like California mandate equal funding across schools, these “equal” resources

are being distributed across geographies with historic inequities, making it difficult to make-do. A correlation between graduation rates and access to the arts is also a key issue, especially amongst African American and Latino communities (NEA, 2009). This is true for those who teach art as well:

...matriculation rates, paired with a lack of background and formative experience in the arts, mean that a disproportionate number of the students who get degrees in, and pursue a career in, the live arts are white. (Lord, 2011, para. 15)

As these trends continue, art education is linked intimately to issues of privilege where schools in wealthy districts will have more access to art education than their underfunded counterparts. As the wealth divide deepens across the U.S., the frequency and quality of arts education for most Americans is invariably impacted.

### **Philosophical Shifts in Art Education**

Philosophies of art education have shifted and changed over the past century, emerging from a Western and formalist philosophy premised on ideas of universal beauty and representation. For instance, the Picture Study Movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was concerned primarily with arts appreciation, positing there is a particular way to view and appreciate “tasteful art”. As philosophers and scholars like Margaret Naumburg (1928) and John Dewey (1934) took on the task of understanding the role of art in schools, a number of theories and ideologies surfaced. Naumburg developed an understanding of art as a therapeutic process, while Dewey argued for art experiences to facilitate forms of democratic thinking and problem solving.

Their work contributed to a philosophy of art education that stressed ways to embody creative expression, and not just passive arts appreciation. This trend continued on into the 1960s and 70s with a number of scholars and educators stressing the need to witness and experience the working process of artists in the field. However, this approach received resistance in the 1980s as the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) provoked an excellence in education reform movement, shifting the focus of arts education toward a discipline-based approach focused on best practices, standards, and assessment rubrics.

In 1994, Present Bill Clinton signed into law the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, and with it the adoption of a national framework for standards-based reform, known today as *Race to the Top*. Criticism and support for these reforms are far and wide. Alfie Kohn (2000) and Svi Shapiro (2006), point out mechanisms like standardized testing are not used to help students learn better, but rather rank schools based on a measure of “superficial thinking”. Kohn argues: “the main objective of these tests is to rank, not to rate; to spread out the scores, not to gauge the quality of a given student or school” (para. 3). What’s more, the variance of these outcomes is unequally distributed based on socioeconomic and racial contexts.

Just weeks before the adoption of *Goals 2000*, the National Art Education Association (1994) submitted the first widely adopted national visual arts standards to Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley. Today, these standards dictate the approach and form of arts learning in most public schools. While teachers have freedom to adapt and determine some of the content in their own classrooms, these standards unconsciously guide the ways art unfolds pedagogically in these spaces. A close reading

of these standards reveals a deeply Cartesian and analytic approach, which reduces art to a series of techniques and skills to master. An ethos of competency, excellence and proficiency, delineates art into the four subcategories of dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts, making little room for anything in between. The primary focus of each discipline is the development:

...of expressive, analytical problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills...to initiate, define, and solve challenging visual arts problems independently using intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. (National Art Education Association, 1994, pg. 6)

This includes “the ability to define and solve artistic problems with insight, reason, and technical proficiency” with the expectation of students to attain competencies in the 4th, 8th, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (pg. 14).

The rampant use of scientific and structural language is repeated throughout the visual art standards framework, used as a means to substantiate art education as a valid discipline that can be measured in the same way as math, science or language arts. The deployment of methods like abstraction and specialization echo this sentiment. A visual arts standard intended for students in grades K-4 for instance, reads as follows:

2. Content Standard: Using knowledge of structures and functions
  - a. know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas
  - b. describe how different expressive features and organizational principles cause different responses
  - c. use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas (pg. 16)

Note the repetition of words like “structure” and “function” to cultivate the use of abstraction and structural analysis as a method for arts instruction, introduced to students as early as age 7. Here art is exploited, like many of the sciences, as a means to codify and essentialize the world around us, distancing students from interdisciplinary forms of critical thinking and reflection. Throughout there is an attempt to integrate ideas of human experience and compassion into these standards, the authors explaining: “arts are a way of knowing...indispensable to freedom of inquiry and expression” (pg. 4). While this sentiment is perhaps well meaning, it remains contradictory to the overwhelming focus on technical mastery and proficiency found throughout the document.

Art teachers are now schooled in ways to implement and manage expectations set forth by these standards. As a result, arts-based learning in the classroom is reduced to stages of deductive reasoning, synthesis of ideas, and assessment of performance. This places both the educator and student in a tenuous relationship with the form and receivership of arts pedagogy, codified as a specific measure of cognitive development. The art of drawing a perfect line, sculpting clay, or mimicking a ballet technique communicates an idea that there is good art and there is bad art, and consequently a good way to make art and wrong way to make art.

What this means for youth and teachers, is art becomes not a way to freely express an idea, but is rather reduced to a technical method to mediate this expression. As students learn how to mimic and represent pastoral landscape paintings, or sculpt in a “proficient” way, students are discouraged from taking risks and asking questions because they are taught there is a proper way to practice and respond to art. If one does

not conform, then a student can be penalized with a bad grade or is publically humiliated by peers or instructor. This creates a culture of fear and shame, leading students to dissociate art as something “other” and reject it as a valid means of expression.

This is not to say there are not amazing teachers, and incredible art experiences being facilitated nationwide, but rather there has been a fundamental shift in the philosophy of arts education, influenced by a cult of accountability and the political motivations of outcomes-based education. The impact of this pedagogical change is something Harvard University researchers Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland (2007) explore in their research study *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education*. What they found through their research at several high schools in Boston was art cannot be correlated to improvements in academic achievement or assessed through standards-aligned outcomes. Art requires a different way of understanding a relationship to learning. Winner (2007) notes:

...these instrumental arguments are going to doom the arts to failure, because any superintendent is going to say, “If the only reason I’m having art is to improve math, let’s just have more math”...the arts need to be valued for their own intrinsic reasons. (para. 5)

While a set of standards may be useful in helping teachers imagine arts-based integration, these standards can be easily coopted as another scientific tool used to determine and reify the meaning and value of art within a formalist discourse. This becomes a dangerous game that can have disastrous affects for youth, their families and community. Art instead must be understood as a process of expression that has more to do with developing empathy and critical thinking. This unfortunately cannot be measured

easily with the current performance rubrics used by most administrators and policy makers in the field today, yet is integral to building an equitable world.

### **Critical Art Pedagogy**

Maxine Greene (1995) and other scholars argue art education should be located in a pedagogy of informed engagements and a conscious struggle to make meaning and critical sense from our experiences in the world through the imagination. As Grosz (2005) explains in Chapter II, art is a liminal space located in primal acts of expression that are always filtered through a series of semiotic and cultural frames. The teaching of art is not just a means to facilitate an aesthetic experience, but rather it opens up spaces of uncertainty and risk that drive meaningful participation and inquiry. For these liminal openings to unfold, education must be disentangled from learning because it will always assume an institutional structure that privileges a hierarchy of knowledge and intelligence.

To confront this, we must examine some of the assumptions implied in conventional art education discourse. In John Baldacchino's (2008) article, *The Praxis of Art's Deschooled Practice*, he discusses some of the tensions linked to art education's desire for legitimization and structure. He outlines three issues that are useful in developing an alternative philosophy, explaining:

1. Art and education are historical constructs that are neither natural nor necessary;
2. Art does not emerge from aesthetic or pedagogical imperatives, but partake of a wider horizon that does include, but is not limited to the arts;
3. Art education remains dispensable, because it has been reduced to an intellectual utility that requires constant justification; (pg. 242)



Baldacchino explains a case for art education must emerge from outside the school to avoid institutional cooption. He explains, “if art conforms, it has no use to learning. If it becomes synonymous with learning, then it is not art anymore” (pg. 243). The tension between these conflicting “realities” is where art education emerges and takes on a political dimension. However, because it can be difficult to see the pedagogical value in this agonistic exchange, it remains challenging to develop meaningful forms of arts pedagogy.

Richard Cary (1998) attempts to extend Baldacchino’s (2008) notion of art education through a lens of critical pedagogy, developing a theory of “critical art pedagogy”. Critical pedagogy is rooted in the teacher-student struggles during apartheid in South Africa, and in the work of Paulo Freire, bell hooks (1994), Giroux (2011), Kincheloe (2004) and others. Freire’s (1970) text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in particular, lays much of the groundwork for what we now understand as critical pedagogy, which understands the process of schooling in the context of power. Critical pedagogues seek to unmask these oppressive systems and promote ideas of social justice and equity. In *Rethinking Intelligence*, Joe Kincheloe (1998) explores the roots of critical pedagogy, understanding this approach as

...a reconceptualization of educational psychology grounded on a democratic vision of inclusivity that refuses to view “others” only through the lenses of dominant (often white, western European, male, middle or upper middle class) culture. (pg. 1)

In developing an understanding of critical art pedagogy, Cary similarly connects art education to systems of power, belief and truth. Critical art pedagogy then presents a

challenge to bourgeois notions of art history, rejecting “artistic knowledge as an intellectual privilege reserved for the elite” (pg. 4).

Apropos in Cary’s discussion, is his acknowledgement of the complex nature through which youth construct their idea of culture. Cary explains that in an effort to form their own identity, most youth reject and resist conventional forms of schooling and art to preserve a sense of self, noting that “students construct their art worlds outside school in the affairs of everyday life” (pg. 12). Here, Cary understands critical theory and pedagogy as connected to personal agency and popular cultures that circulate in the lived experience of youth.

Conventional art education often discredits these sources of knowledge and reinforces control in the classroom through fine art mastery. Cary asks us to first recognize art’s place in constructing these relationships, and for the educator to examine ways to negotiate and confront their own power as both artists and educators. An alternative philosophy of art education thus integrates many of the concepts Cary, Baldacchino, and Greene locate as necessary to maintain art as a radical tool for expression, and learning as a vehicle to facilitate experiences through these ongoing engagements. A critical art pedagogy approaches education through a lens of reflective examination, understanding art as a device for unmasking oppression and privilege, while making a space for multiple approaches to art expression and making. This has less to do with the products or method used in art education, and is more closely aligned with processes used to consider the positionality of the learner, the teacher and site-specific context as interconnected and relevant to art making and learning.

## **Teaching Artists in the United States**

While the definition of a teaching artist (TA) varies, many practitioners agree this role involves an artist for whom teaching is a part of their professional practice. Alan Thornton (2011) points out however, there “is no unequivocal evidence to suggest that ability as an art teacher is dependent on also being a continuing artist” (pg. 32). While defining the idea of the teaching artist is problematic in many ways, it is important to understand some of the historical and political contexts that have shaped their contemporary role in schools, museums and other spaces.

In a 2011 teaching artist study conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, researchers found the majority of teaching artists surveyed (3550 participants) work for non-profit entities, while some work with community-based schools, theaters or dance organizations, museums or institutions of higher learning. NORC loosely defined teaching artist in this study as “an artist who teaches” (pg. 156). In regards to economic stability, most TAs were found to be unsalaried, typically have multiple jobs and are often not guaranteed a renewed contract for their work. Teaching artists also work mostly with younger audiences, providing a gateway to the arts through the mastery of basic skills in music, visual arts, dance, and theater. The work of teaching artists fluctuates depending on funding cycles and the continued reform of public education. The diversity of TAs was higher than most artist communities, while a majority of TAs had some form of higher education and two thirds were women.

In looking at some of the challenges linked to the work of teaching artists, it is important to note that for many the designation of TA can be quite difficult to navigate.

The public school domain for instance, can be unwelcoming to an outside presence like a visiting artist. Eric Booth (2010), editor of *Teaching Artists Journal*, speaks to many of the underlying fears and stress that an identity of teaching artist can engender:

...(for teachers) the teaching artists is a cheap way to replace “real” arts learning programs and full time teachers, and that teaching artists come in, stir things up that are not supportive of the ongoing work in the school and then disappear; and (for teaching artists) school programs are old-fashioned and dull, not good enough to turn on the young, and that arts specialists are unable or unwilling to engage students ambitiously and creatively. (pg. 4)

Booth points out, the development of a teaching artist identity is a complex and nuanced process, which is difficult to sustain without continued support from an organization or school over time. This is further complicated by the demands of an excellence reform movement that continues to demand that art education programs deliver academic results and behavioral improvement. While art can have some influence in these arenas, the limited scope and time frame of most programs make this difficult to achieve.

In a UK-based study of teaching artist experience, James Hall (2010) found that despite many of these challenges, most TAs are able to cultivate meaningful relationships with students and develop projects that experiment with the art education. This work allows TAs to extend artistic, social and professional networks attached to their personal experience as artists and community members. Hall also found a healthy negotiation of identities can often lead toward renewed curiosity in the work of artists and the work of their students, embedding a greater sense of risk and authenticity through art process and learning.

While historically teaching artists have existed in many different forms, the popularization of their role in schools is linked to a number of socio-economic and cultural movements and events. Today, the landscape of teaching artistry is complex including small community-based programs, regional projects and national initiatives. The 2011 NORC study explains most urban centers like Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles and New York have comprehensive arts education programs that include provisions for teaching artists. However, a number of challenges to sustaining this work continue to emerge from education policymakers who demand more quantitative evidence. This is compounded by resistance from the arts education community itself who argue “TAs lack the training to be expert educators, no matter how expert they may be in their art form...” (pg. 16). Despite this, teaching artists continue to collaborate with schools and communities and develop projects that play with what art education can and should be.

### **Contemporary Teaching Artists**

In recent decades, the role of the teaching artist has expanded alongside new ideas of social engagement and participation. Although this is not an exclusively new phenomenon, the frequency and occurrence of teaching artists using socially engaged practices has increased over time (Helguera, 2011). Denis Atkinson (2012) charts the rise of these new modes of working, explaining:

...more artists today are quitting the art world, sacrificing their coefficient of artistic visibility in favour of a more corrosively dissensus-engendering capacity in the dominant semiotic order. (pg. 7)

Institutions like the Hammer Museum in L.A., or the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis for instance are inviting artists and educators to create site-specific works to engage a range of publics. Universities are also launching transdisciplinary incubators like the Urban Landscape Lab at Columbia University or the Waffle Shop at Carnegie Mellon, drawing from local art and design communities to imagine place-based projects. Atkinson (2012) refers to these new forms of collaboration as “local curations of learning” involving a movement into a new ontological state where “the disruption of established ways of knowing...allows learners to handle states of uncertainty” (pg. 10).

While the particular role of the teaching artist ranges from site to site, a number of non-profits offer residency-based programs that immerse artists inside school settings, while other projects are more distributed and self-initiated by artists. In many cases, research and forms of collaborative inquiry are used as a tool to identify a relevant issue or concern, and a teaching artist will lead youth through a process of responding to this issue. Organizations like the Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York City for instance offer “urban investigations” and “city studies” that match a teaching artist with a school to explore how the city works, creating short films, publications, exhibitions and performances in response.

On both a pragmatic and theoretical level, these approaches differ from what is typically offered in a conventional art education program. The focus is not on mastering a fine art technique or skill, but rather encourages participants to respond critically to a place-based issue that has some shared relevance to a local community or peer network. The teaching artist is a co-participant in this process, guiding the group through a series

real-world encounters and aesthetic experiences that help visualize and understand complex issues.

While some contemporary teaching artists work regularly with the same partner or schools, many lead a nomadic existence working in large urban centers that offer part-time or seasonal work. Miwon Kwon (2004) speaks to this issue, noting how the complications of locational identity can present challenges to working consistently with a particular school or community group. Although these challenges make it difficult to sustain long term engagements, many teaching artists find ways to channel a creative process and co-develop inquiries that are both relevant and stimulating to participants and artist. This is a complex negotiation, and is difficult to teach in an art education program but is rather worked out through real-world experience. In the section, we'll look closely at how these projects operate pedagogically.

### **Exploring Post-Studio Project-Works**

In a broad sense we can characterize the practices explored in this study as contemporary post-studio “project-works”. A project-work referring to an aesthetic process or art practice that takes the form of an ongoing or temporary “project”, while “post-studio” refers to a set of site-specific, socially engaged or participatory critical art practice. A project-work can be initiated in a number of ways: independently by an artist or group of artists, on behalf of a cultural/educational institution, in collaboration with a non-profit or community, or a combination of these forms. To critically consider these project-works, it is important to understand the positionality of the artist(s) involved and the contexts of the site itself.

In large part, institutions like museums, galleries, and schools are gatekeepers of these projects, which often come with a set of preexisting agendas. In cases where a project is initiated by an institution, artists are often selected based on some preexisting relationship or skill. In other cases, a call for applications will provide a more open forum for artists to submit ideas that are then selected by a committee or organization. Often a non-profit, cultural institution or NGO will motivate a project for specific purposes linked to grant monies or institutional goals. The school site or space where projects unfold is then predetermined as well by these institutions. For example a museum will work with a local school, a non-profit will target “at-risk” youth in a marginalized community, or an institution will provide a public space for the project to occur. In self-initiated projects, points of access are more incidental, located in a shared or individual desire to make or explore some concept/idea that requires public participation or involvement. Still yet, some artists may be especially interested in accessing spaces like a school because of their inherently political context.

In many project-works a space is created outside an institution or school. Storefront spaces, streetscapes, public parks, restaurants and town squares become a space through which a project unfolds and interaction occurs. Still yet, hybridized forms emerge where participants may navigate a variety of terrains over time as the project changes form in response to the needs and circumstance of the group. In most cases a deeper engagement with a small group of people is desirable, although sporadic or ecstatic singular experiences can also be transformative.



As the project launches, a group of people and collaborative process is developed. Next, a set of inquiries that informs the project's intent is either co-constructed by participants or mediated by the artist or institution. After an inquiry or theme is chosen, an artist and participants will begin to experiment, making media, exploring a site and having conversations. These experiences will often lead to movements, gestures, or moments that create meaning, a set of artifacts, and ideas that form the innards of the project. While most project-work resists the desire to produce objects or products to represent a process, a set of expectations from outside forces may require this. In some cases the production of something tangible can be helpful, whereas in other cases this may distract from the kind of open-ended aims of a particular inquiry. As project-works come to a close, publics, family members and friends are invited to share in the project's findings, often taking the form of a small exhibition, performance, or media work.

Pedagogically this work activates modes of divergent thinking, linked to Ellsworth's (2005) notion of the learning self. There are a number of pedagogical strategies that make this possible. A dialogic mode of address invites an exchange of ideas and interpretation of a shared or relevant inquiry. This further invites participatory interaction with and through a project-work that allow structures of trust and accountability to form. There is also a kind of perspectival learning enacted wherein knowledge itself is always considered to be partial, or incomplete in some way.

Intuition and creativity are key factors here, offering youth a space to explore the unknown and sensate. A collection of indeterminate and improvised pedagogies is often used as an artist begins a project without a clear objective, instead relying on incidental

and chance interactions to inform next steps. Finally, these practices also tend to be research-based, using storytelling, archiving, and peer knowledge to inform a process or provide some source material. This allows participants to enter into confrontational and vulnerable spaces, where empathy and agency emerge.

In most cases, the entirety of this project arc is rarely realized in the way it was intended due to temporal, fiscal, and other logistical constraints. The site or group of people involved may also lose trust with a process as subtle forms of exploitation, typically motivated by an institution, transfer onto a project or teaching artist. The socio-economic circumstance of raced and gendered identities of participants in a project-work, as well as the context of the site play a large factor in the works “success” or completion. In many cases, the artist is often placed in a double bind, accountable to a particular group of people, while also obliged to conform to the expectations of an institution. This makes project-work complex and messy, a process which will often end up more ambiguous than initially planned. The loose aim, if there is one at all, is that participants leave more curious than when they arrived.

**Table 1. Common Post-Studio Project Models**

Model	Description
Urban Investigations	A model for exploring urban spaces with youth, directing an inquiry toward a shared challenge or site-specific problem. A teaching artist will guide a process of investigation informed by a co-constructed inquiry, encouraging youth to explore responses through art media and experiences.

Media Experiments	The use of photography, sound, film and social media to develop youth-led media projects that explore digital storytelling in different ways. This often includes the mastery of a specific skill, ie. photography or field recording, but is equally interested in the process of critiquing popular media and the use of storytelling as a vehicle for sharing voice with peers.
Exhibition Focused	A cultural/social institution will organize a specific series of residencies, workshops or a larger project formed around the content and ideas of a preexisting or future exhibition. This becomes a way to invite youth or publics into the work of the artists on display in a more engaged and deep way.
Design/Build Projects	Architectural and design projects that require the physical construction of spaces that respond in some way to a set of circumstances determined by a place. The scale is dependent on the project ranging from the creation of furniture, to features added to a façade of a building or the creation of a new structure for use.
Social Renewals	The attempt to ameliorate or mediate a social concern through an art project typically involving marginalized groups based on socio-economic or identitarian issues. Social or governmental institutions often motivate these projects, interested in some pragmatic return on investment through art.
Residency-Based Projects	A residency organized in collaboration with a particular institution or school with a group or individual artist. The arrangements are often flexible and project content developed by the artist in collaboration with a site.
Event-Based Performances/Projects	Artists, musicians, dancers, performance artists are invited to organize an event or performance in concert with a group of youth or public. This takes the form of some culminating event where multiple audiences can take part.
Systemic Interventions	In some cases, cultural institutions or schools will engage in more systemic projects aimed at developing a new discourse or framework for exploring art concepts and processes. This may entail the development of a new rubric for assessment, adaption or arts integration.

## **A History of Participatory and Social Art**

The history of “social art practice” is still a widely debated issue amongst many scholars in the arts and culture field, yet most agree a singular definition or understanding of social art practice does not exist. For the purposes of this study, we can generally understand “social art practice” as a set of creative practices involving social contexts in their intent and form. These practices typically blur the lines between activism, performance, community engagement, and organizing, seeking a public or audience to interact and participate in this work. While these practices are currently in vogue, the scholars and thinkers discussed here echo a need to critically understand the cultural context and varied histories surrounding this reemerging field.

As early as the 1910s, artists and thinkers around Europe and Asia began to radically experiment with different art forms and practices. In Italy, an avant-garde movement known as “Futurism” led in part by artist Filippo Marinetti began to influence approaches in painting, architecture, sculpture and performance. Many Futurist artists were attracted to the theatre because of the opportunity to display, perform and make art in spaces outside of museums, galleries or studios. In performative dinner events known as “serates” for instance, artists, poets, musicians and actors would perform on stage and invite audiences to interact. Around the same time in Russia, following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, artists like Alexander Rodchenko, Lyubov Popova and Vladimir Tatlin explored ways of making art that dealt with industrialization and utilitarian design. Similar to the Futurists in Italy, these artists championed the theater as an arena to experiment with collectively authored productions. In 1920, this movement reached a

crescendo with the largest art production in Russian history, *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, a theater event that involved nearly 8,000 people in a militaristic re-enactment of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Similarly in France, the Dada movement coalesced during the 1920s, interested more in intimate interaction with publics, and a commitment to the individual imagination. Andre Breton, one of Dada's prominent organizers famously arranged a Dada happening called *Excursion to Saint Julien-le-Pauvre*, which re-imagined a guided tour as a series of public interactions. Artists were positioned around the city as a roving public encountered opera, performative readings, chance engagements and re-enactments across the city of Paris.

In many ways, a move toward participatory practice was a response to changing political ideologies after World War I. A global movement in capitalist industrialization similarly provoked artists to confront a range of social and political issues from colonial encounter to oppressive labor practice. Here there was a marked attempt to reconcile what Guy Debord (1967) and Jean Luc Nancy (1986) describe as the dehumanizing effects of capitalist production, the removal of authentic community, the rise of the spectacle, and the fetishization of the art object. A reconceptualization of the relationship between artist, artwork and audience thus sought to “channel art’s symbolic capital towards constructive social change” and “a repair of the social bond” (Bishop, 2012, pg. 17).

In response to increasingly precarious social conditions, many artists felt the only course of action left was a theatre of action, a direct engagement with these forces of

production (Sholette, 2005). This confrontation sought new strategies to challenge the bourgeois status quo, embracing site-specific practices and new modes of participation. In so doing, the artist shifted “from an individual producer of objects to a collaborator and producer of situations...” (Bishop, 2012, pg. 2).

In the U.S, these shifts led to a collection of radical art movements encompassing the feminist and performance art movements of the 1960 and 70s, the activist movement of the 1980s, and a community-arts revival in the U.S. and U.K. in the 1990s. However, as artists came to terms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century with issues of inequality, dematerialization, and socially aware critique, a set of critical practices were absorbed by the very institutions for which artists devised alternative strategies. Federica Buetti (2011) explains:

...the institutionalization of critical practices, i.e. practices that confront the role of art and art institutions, trapped these artists within an exhausting loop of self-reflection and the eager expectation of idiosyncratic output. (pg. 1)

While the focus of the 1960s and 70s was to find ways to merge art and the everyday, we are currently fixated on the pathology of modernity. Every social cause must have a remedy, and art is surely the cure. This has contributed to a proliferation of socially motivated public art projects and events, which have restructured our relationship to museums, public spaces and urban landscapes. Artists like Suzanne Lacey, Mierele Ukeles, Nam June Paik, Lygia Clark, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Phillippe Parreno, Felix Gonzalez Torres and Vanessa Beecroft among others began to craft social situations into museum exhibitions meant to involve the viewer directly in participation with the work.

While these projects vary in scope and form, they helped redefine a field often fixated on art objects rather than the immediacy of social condition and political circumstance. From the culture wars of the 1980s to public art projects around the country, socially engaged artists re-imagined a cultural landscape and the public's view of art in many ways.

Theoretically, Bishop (2004) explains these gestures draw from scholars like Umberto Eco (1962), who proposed a new “mechanics of aesthetic perception” organized around art as “communicative situations” that require both “contemplation and utilization” of the artwork (pg. 15). Nicolas Bourriard's (1998) concept of “relational aesthetics”, attempts to transpose Eco's notion of communicative reflection onto a specific kind of art practice that requires direct participation. Yet, Bishop argues the interactivity of a relational artwork can also privilege the work's capacity to provide critical reflection. Social works are then seen to be automatically political in some way and always “capable of producing positive human relationships” (Bishop, 2004, pg. 62). Bishop (2004) urges us to pay attention to the quality of relationship produced through a relational artwork, asking “what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (pg. 65).

In her most recent work, *Artificial Hells*, Bishop (2012) continues to critique a notion of the “artist as a social healer”. Here she expresses a need to critically examine social practices because they are often:

...perceived to be equally important artistic gestures of resistance: there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of repairing the social bond. (pg. 13)

Due in part to their moral imperative, institutions and critics tend to privilege these forms of art, creating a paradoxical situation that challenges art's autonomy and transforms it into a kind of social service program. Jacques Ranciere (2010) echoes these sentiments in his work *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics*, asking does art need to be removed from the art world in order for it to be effective? Here there is a sense that socially engaged practices are more real and important than other experiences because they fulfill a moral obligation. However, "good art", as Ranciere (2004) and Bishop (2004, 2012) point out, neither strives toward reconciling the social or political, but rather continue to play with and explore the tension between these worlds. In this negotiation one sees a mutual kind of dependency at once produced by social conditions, and simultaneously addressed through artistic and aesthetic means. The real goal then is not in their unison but continued antagonism.

### **Power and Dialogue in Community Art Practices**

Grant Kester's (1995) essay *Aesthetic Evangelists*, adds to Bishop's critique of participatory art, similarly highlighting a concern toward forms of community art making and public art. The kinds of projects Kester speaks to follow a well accepted script: an artist is invited to work with a community of people (often marginalized in some way) by a privileged art institution, the artist enters the community to create a work of art with the intention of addressing some kind of social concern, and then leaves the work behind. The community is then "transformed", the institution supposedly develops deep links to this community, and a new work of public art is created. While these works can at times



be transformative, Kester argues that they can easily exploit a community in ways that are counter to the project's initial intent.

To begin his examination, Kester focuses on some of common challenges associated with community-based practice. He points out these projects often create structures of difference between an artist and a community characterized by racial, ethnic, gender or class-based identities. As an artist enters into a relationship with this community, a spokesperson is typically chosen to speak on behalf of the group by the artist. Kester references Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) notion of a "delegate", which "legitimizes his or her political power through the act of literally representing or exhibiting the community..." (pg. 4). Here an artist uses their signifying authority to derive an exchange with the community that is pedagogical, often surrendering creative autonomy in some way, and therefore gaining authority to speak on behalf of this group. Kester characterizes this as a "moment of transference", where an artist will attempt to establish some form of moral equivalence between their position and the community. However, this well-meaning gesture often disavows the previous history of the community and its relationship to deeply entrenched systems of oppression, attempting "to literally 'create' a community consciousness out of the atomized social detritus of late capitalism" (pg. 5).

Kester links this phenomenon to a historical ethos of patronage, welfare and moral evangelism in the United States. Instead of addressing the root causes of poverty, healthcare, or schooling, Americans have pathologized the individual, assuming the "moral inferiority of the individual subject" (pg. 13). This leads to a mapping of problems

within marginalized communities, and proposing rational solutions to end systematic issues like racism and class-conflict by empowering the individual. Kester likens this to a kind of “neo-Victorian evangelism”, in which people take responsibility for their original sins. Artists in this way are positioned as social workers or what he calls “trans-historical shamans”:

...this focus on the primacy of individual transformation implies (1) that the individual *is* morally or emotionally flawed, (2) that this flaw bears a causal relation to their current (economically, emotionally, socially, or creatively) "disempowered" status, and (3) that the artist is in a position to remedy this flaw...(pg. 21)

Kester also warns us to be wary of increased assessment frameworks, which seek to calculate the social utility of social art practices based on some measure of consciousness or social policy changed. He argues instead, critical social art practices require a “rearticulation or renegotiation of aesthetic autonomy” that focus on temporal and contextual shifts in praxis (Ranciere, 2005, pg. 56). In more recent texts, Kester has eased his suspicion of community arts practices, finding a collection of examples outside the U.S. that offer an alternative to this “textual paradigm” in activist art making. He argues instead for a form of dialogic art that understands the complicated relationship between positionality, intent and desire in the creation of public and participatory artworks. Here the aim is to champion more immersive, embedded and relational practices that seek to build structures of participation and learning that have shared relevance, forms of mutual accountability and open-ended goals that can shift and grow over time.

## **Public Pedagogy**

### **The Public Sphere**

As critical theorists began to explore the sociological and political contexts of space and our production of these spaces, the concept of “public” or “publicness” was central to this debate. The work of post-structural scholar Jürgen Habermas (1962) is commonly identified as a significant contribution in this respect. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas explores how public space, or what he terms “the public sphere”, is conceptualized and created. He argues that European culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and prior was dominated by a “representational culture”, where a select few individuals in power controlled dominant ideas on behalf of a passive population. As tools like the printing press, newspapers, literary salons and journals became more prevalent an emerging “public sphere” replaced this representational culture. Habermas describes the public sphere theoretically as a “public” space where everyone has equal access to shaping and contributing to social and political discourses. However, he concedes this notion of the public sphere has eroded over time with the rise of commercial mass media and corporate capitalism in a neoliberal state.

In a vernacular sense, the notion of public is often associated with institutions that provide some social service, and open access to space and ideas. We also commonly attach the idea of shared ownership and value to ideas of public, versus an individual interest that is private. Gert Biesta (2012) points out the idea of a public sphere is different from that of a public space, because it is not necessarily situated in a physical location but rather as a form of interaction. Biesta also argues through the work of

Hannah Arendt (1997), the notion of publicness has more to do with the availability and circulation of political agency and freedom, or “our capacity to do something that has not been done before” (pg. 687). Arendt refers to this as a kind of beginning, in which “something is called into being which did not exist before” (Arendt, 1977, pg. 151). This action is dependent on the presence of others, a “condition of plurality”, which holds us accountable to self and other in what Biesta calls a “citizenship of strangers” (pg. 9).

For Michael Warner (2002) a public is a “social totality” and also a concrete audience located in a physical space and time. He points out the nuanced distinction between *a* public and *the* public, noting the way different audiences and circulation of partial publics are connoted by each usage. For Warner a public is something that is self-organized, possessing a way for it to be addressed as a discourse, and organized independently of accepted institutions. Publics do not form purely from a common identity, but rather in shared social relationships that emerge through actionable contexts. The existence of a public is then “contingent on its members’ activity”, and the attention given within and around this activity (pg. 61). Warner likens this to volunteer groups, which are able to create temporary social spaces and a circulation of ideas.

Other scholars like Richard Sennet (1974) and later Bruce Robbins (1993) question whether the idea of public has ever existed. Equal access to physical places and conceptual spaces has never existed to the extent that it can be argued as universal. This is especially true in the wake of a prevailing global capitalism, which has arguably transformed almost all of our experiences into forms of commercial mediation. Glenn Savage (2010) in his critique of public pedagogy asks, “to what extent can we feasibly

suggest that “public space” has *ever* existed...”, arguing the onslaught of globalizing capitalism has eroded any possibility of a pure form of publicness (pg. 105). This does not mean the idea of public or a public sphere should be discarded, but rather re-imagined as a more dynamic and fragmented agent of both cultural production and experience.

### **Counterpublics**

In *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, Nancy Fraser (1990) critiques a Habermasian idea of the public sphere within a framework of feminist theory. Fraser’s initial contention is focused on the ways in which Habermas conflates the public sphere with a hegemonic state and institutions that mediate public opinion. Fraser points out that woman and other marginalized groups are excluded from this account, yet have always founded and sustained their own “counterpublic” arenas that indeed influence the public sphere and access to it. She describes these social groups as “subaltern counterpublics”, which invent and circulate counterdiscourses and oppositional practices linked to marginalized and often subordinated identities and needs. Fraser explains women, queer communities, workers, and people of color form counterpublic spheres to imagine a divergent social reality in response to sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of oppression. These counterpublic spaces enable groups of people to enter into an accepted public sphere, but also signal spaces of withdrawal and regroupment, often training grounds for “agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (Fraser, 1990, pg. 68).

In his work, *After the Public Turn*, Frank Farmer (2013) characterizes members of counterpublic groups as citizen bricoleurs, individuals engaged in a kind of radically flexible handiwork, making use of what’s available at hand. Farmer links this idea to

Levi-Strauss' (1962) conception of bricolage as something that is both resistant and constructive, and ultimately situated in everyday practice. Warner (2002) and Farmer (2013) explain what make counterpublics unique is the particularity of their social formation and the invention of “counterdiscourses” that recognize the group’s subordinate status within a dominant culture and public.

These discourses are not just alternative modes of address, but rather oppositional practices that others may regard with hostility. Warner also argues counterpublics possess a different kind of “stranger-sociability”, making membership and participation in a counterpublic especially nuanced and specific. Within a queer counterpublic for instance, Warner explains a unique set of cultural and performative acts are circulated that only members of the counterpublic can easily access or “know” through direct experience and participation. In so doing, counterpublics acquire and exercise agency in distinctive ways, “fashioning their own subjectivities” around particular practices (Warner, 2002, pg. 87).

### **Approaches to Public Pedagogy**

The concept of public pedagogy has been explored by a number of scholars, often described as education and learning that occurs outside of schools, or established curricular aims (Brady, 2006; Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick, 2010; Giroux, 2000; Hickey-Moody, Savage and Windle, 2010). It was used early on as a framework to encourage citizenship and national identity, and is commonly associated with spaces of informal learning like museums, zoos or parks, and public policy. In a North American context Gert Biesta (2012) points out, public pedagogy is often connected to activist and emancipatory forms of critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux’s (2000; 2003; 2004) work is

most often cited in this context, drawing from thinkers like Gramsci (1971), and feminist scholars such as C. Luke (1996), Brady (1998; 2002) and others, who argue everyday practices and forms of popular and corporate culture unfold as sites for public pedagogies.

Giroux (2000) specifically explores public pedagogy as a form of cultural politics, developing an idea of “critical public pedagogy” that refers to the use of popular culture as an emancipatory tool that can interrupt and decode dominant signs, identities, and beliefs. Referencing the work of Stuart Hall (1997), Giroux argues culture is an essential ingredient to the development of affective pedagogies because they provide a context and material to renegotiate power relations and articulations of shifting identity and belonging. Sandlin (2008) describes this as a kind of cultural resistance, using Brian Duncombe’s (2002) definition of culture used “to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure” (p. 5).

While there is a wealth of literature on public pedagogy, many authors explore the shortcomings and constraints of its use in both theoretical and practical applications. Biesta (2012) for instance points out the use of public pedagogy as a form of instruction or learning runs the risk of “replacing politics by education” (pg. 684). He bemoans the use of public pedagogy as an analytic tool to critique popular culture and media, which is reified into an instructive form of conscientization. Glenn Savage (2010) similarly calls attention to public pedagogy’s “enveloping negativity”, particularly the vilification of popular and public forms of knowledge that supposedly corrupts individuals. Savage (2010) explains public pedagogy is often mythologized as a negative ideological force to

fight against, which delimits the “counter hegemonic possibilities of popular culture forms as vehicles of resistance” (pg. 104). He argues instead for a more decentered approach to understanding public pedagogy as constituting multiple publics, and emerging from an individual’s subjective experience of corporate, popular and cultural pedagogies in motion.

### **Counterpublic Pedagogy**

While there are a number of parallels to Giroux’s (2000, 2003) idea of critical public pedagogy, counterpublic pedagogies are not solely interested in emancipatory forms of social justice, but in creating the conditions necessary for new social imaginaries and countercultural practices to extend into a wider public sphere. This in many ways echoes Biesta’s (2012) characterization of public pedagogy as opening a space for the possibility of freedom, describing a public pedagogue as an educational agent that is no longer a facilitator but someone who interrupts. The aim is not to instruct, inspire or direct forms of learning outside the classroom, but rather to provide a space for “friction against the dominant public” (Warner, 2002, pg. 86). Warner’s example of specific queer acts of performativity like parades or drag culture for instance, require us to inhabit a different language and understanding of culture, and in so doing confront our relationship to a gendered “other”.

Triggs et al. (2010) also explain decentered public pedagogies create a space for deep reflection and the possibility to imagine something outside of ourselves. Sandlin (2007) refers to this as a “détournement” in her exploration of culture jamming, which offers an opportunity for “becoming someone different” (pg. 79). This unfolds through



acts of play, parody, provocation, and ecstatic experience, in which individuals are able to enact politics because they are sharing in the production of culture and knowledge. These exchanges provide opportunities for counterpublics to form and circulate around shared cultural activities and oppositional practices, allowing for the cultivation of new and re-appropriated cultural and political discourses.

The kinds of learning and education that extend from a counterpublic pedagogy involve both members of a counterpublic and multiple public spheres in different ways. For members of a counterpublic, learning may extend more horizontally around specific events, acts of storytelling, or experiences with the group. While those outside of a counterpublic sphere would experience learning differently, perhaps confrontationally through uncertain movements and languages that deviate from one's typical everyday experience. In witnessing or partially participating in a counterpublic pedagogy, specific questions, concerns and ideas about the world are not only brought to fore, but new practices and ideas of sociality and publicness are modeled, imagined and provoked. This develops in ways that deviate from a cultural public pedagogy in the kinds of agency and forms of membership afforded to individuals, making counterpublic pedagogies often purposefully temporary, confrontational and context-specific.

**Table 2. Some Approaches to Public Pedagogy**

<b>Form</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>Public Pedagogy</b>	Use sites outside the school for learning; exposure to political and cultural discourses and	Field trips, project/place-based learning; Participation in family life,	Development of citizenship; Democratic forms of education and schooling; public

	public policies;	community, use of popular culture as curriculum	intellectualism
<b>Critical Public Pedagogy</b>	Understanding popular culture as a political instrument in development of identity; emancipation and social justice;	Acts of cultural resistance and democratic politics; forms of critical pedagogy and media literacy; public artistry	Dismantling/critique of neoliberalism and global capitalism; socially just citizenry
<b>Counterpublic Pedagogy</b>	Creation of spaces outside of accepted public sphere; circulation of oppositional practices and counterdiscourses	Countercultural performative and political acts; identity-based transgressions and struggles; public artistry	Cultivating spaces of possibility; development of institutional and social imaginaries; creation of transitional spaces

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HUNT

We are getting  
rid of ownership, substituting use.  
Beginning with ideas. Which ones can we  
take? Which ones can we give?  
*Disappearance of power politics. Non-  
measurement. Japanese, he said: we  
also hear with our feet.* (Cage, 1963, pg. 3)

In every hunt for wild mushrooms, there is an element of risk. A single misidentification can result in disastrous sickness or even death. The responsible mycologist will use caution to assure they avoid this fate, often cross-referencing two field guides, and consulting with another mushroom enthusiast. John Cage himself nearly died several times at the hand of mushrooms, yet continued to hunt albeit with an even keener sense of observation. To truly “know” and identify a mushroom one must know the trees around it, the soil type, weather patterns, and be attuned to ecological relationships of all kinds. The hunter’s desire for edible mushrooms is thus balanced with necessary caution and an element of reflexivity. If ignored, the hunter faces certain peril.

This mushroom hunter’s code is an apt metaphor for the practice of critical research. In conducting research, just as in hunting for mushrooms, there is a need to constantly recognize and reflect on our positionality in the world. If we fail to make this discernment, then our fates are inevitably bound to a kind of epistemological poisoning. Research, like the hunt for mushrooms, is also indeterminate and uncertain. The

likelihood of not being able to definitively identify a wild mushroom, or perhaps the truth one hopes to find, is almost always a factor. This is something to embrace as we draw on the knowledge of others. To truly know a mushroom, we must know ourselves.

## **Methodology**

### **A/r/tography**

Getting up from the wheel, he said, “I’m not interested in results; just going on. Art’s in process of coming into its own: life.” (Cage, 1963, pg. 6)

The research methodology of a/r/tography is a guiding framework for arts-based and critical research practices used in this study. A/r/tography considers the identities of artist, researcher and teacher in a “contiguous relation”, imagining creative forms of textual and visual expression as a kind of living inquiry (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005). Through a/r/tographic methods, art making and writing become conduits for engaged and deep investigation of both self and other, a space of active participation that resists any essentializing form of evaluation and judgment.

Stephanie Springgay and Irit Rogoff (2005) describe this as a methodology of embodiment, never isolated in its activity but always engaged with the world. A/r/tographers navigate their roles as artist, researcher and teacher through the experience of the everyday, striving to make sense of complex questions that cannot be answered with positivist science. They describe this is a place of “dis/comfort”, a process of “re-writing and recreating”, a “making strange” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, pg. 902).

Examples of a/r/tographic methods and processes range from visual essays, performative ethnographies, interpreting texts through poetry and movement, and digital

media experiments among others. Springgay, Irwin and Kind (2005) offer six renderings for an a/r/tographic approach, which include contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess to provide a path for embodied, visual and textual representations for making sense of complex situations. The idea is not to simply layer art-making techniques on top of or around conventional qualitative research, but instead to imagine wholly new domains where creative approaches to both art and research can emerge through a situated inquiry.

In many ways, a/r/tography draws from the discourse of critical qualitative inquiry to situate the researcher in a reflexive and subjective positionality. Critical qualitative research is an interpretive process often linked to a goal of moral discernment and social action, oriented toward unmasking inequities and providing an opportunity to share the voice of marginalized people. In his book *The Qualitative Manifesto*, Norman Denzin (2010) links the goals of critical inquiry to Paulo Freire's (1970) idea of "conscientization" where the oppressed gain voice and contribute to transforming their culture. The aim here is to promote social transformation by considering an ethic of moral and sacred epistemology, stressing ideas of nonviolence, truth telling and cherishing human life.

There are a number of benefits and drawbacks to this approach to research. The a/r/tographic process allows one to situate the often-competing identities of artist, researcher and teacher in ways that augment what Denzin (2010) calls "interpretive sufficiency". Yet a/r/tography also opens up sites of possibility to experience and (re)construct what research can be. Not just an extrapolation of data sets and

observations, but rather “qualitative inquiry becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project” (Denzin, 2010, pg. 27). This requires an understanding of research as a performative act that is shaped by socio-political forces and structures of power, that require the researcher to consider issues of trustworthiness and reflexivity paramount.

In the context of this study, a/r/tography provided a space to access the research process as both an artist and researcher and to think artfully about how to share stories of individuals that are often overlooked or unconsidered. To approach this, I was able to develop several visual methods and embodied strategies to explore theoretical and qualitative findings throughout. For instance, a/r/tographic methods provided a space to (un)structure interview sessions with each artist, framing each encounter as a collaborative dialogue through the practice of mushroom hunting. These walks provided a space to not only produce and circulate knowledge, but also resulted in the creation of sculptural art works, silkscreens and a video work that is explained in detail in the following section. Philosophically, a/r/tography offered a space to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty of inquiry, leading to more questions and thought processes that are ongoing.

### **Portraiture**

In addition to a/r/tography, this study draws from the research practice of portraiture. Pioneered by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) and later by Jessica Hoffman Davis (2003), portraiture provides a humanist and reflective orientation to research that focuses more on the lived experience and context of an inquiry. In using portraiture as a method, a researcher draws from a repertoire of storytelling and narrative analysis to

draw out the “goodness” in a research subject, “rather than interpret competing or contradicting meanings and experiences as problems to be resolved” (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2011, pg. 4).

Portraiture also considers the researcher as a vital instrument, using interpretive creative writing to create an account of experiences and stories while leaving room for critical interpretation. Dixon, Chapman and Hill (2005) similarly explain portraiture as a “blending of qualitative methodologies - life history, naturalist inquiry” as well as aesthetic and artistic modalities (pg. 17). This allows for a more relational and phenomenologically inclined research practice to unfold that is inclusive of the complex negotiations of a researcher’s firsthand experience, and a desire to locate counterstories of strength, instead of failure and deficit (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2003).

In the context of this study, a “portrait” of each artist included in Chapter V provides a platform to access selected art works, and consider connections between their practice and life story. Portraiture also provides an opportunity to integrate field notes collected during each interview as “journal entries” found at the beginning of each section in Chapter V. These short narratives provide a glimpse into the experience of each mushroom hunting excursion and compliment selected dialogue between each artist when mushrooms were found along a trail route. More than this, portraiture was an integral tool in framing the analysis of each artist’s work and story as something interconnected to broader socio-cultural issues, existing relationships, and future collaborations.

## **Research Process and Methods**

### **Participant Selection**

Participants included in this project are referred to primarily as “artists”, but also as “teaching artists” depending on context or situation. Each participant was selected specifically because of their history in using post-studio and socially engaged art practices that include youth and publics in different ways. Each artist was initially contacted via email or through phone conversation to participate in the research study. A total of 15 artists were contacted, and from this list four were selected because of their willingness and availability to collaborate. The sample size, while small in some respects, was determined according to available funding and scheduling constraints.

With regards to participant positionality, each artist identifies as “white” and describes growing up in a “middle class” household. Participants are also college educated, each holding a BFA or BA from their respective institution. Thornton, Peterson and Clark identify as straight, while Woolard identifies as “queer”. Current income levels fluctuate for each participant but range from \$10-25,000/year. The table below outlines some biographical and professional data from each participant.

**Table 3. Participant Information**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Projects</b>	<b>Concepts Explored</b>
<b>Kate Clark</b> Born: Anacortes, WA Lives: San Diego, CA Age: 27	UCSD graduate student and teacher; organizer; artist; teaching artist	Knowledge Commons D.C., <i>Native Stars, Old Town</i>	Ritual, historical re-enactment, digital storytelling, ethnography



<b>Rob Peterson</b> Born: Shreveport, LA Lives: Queens, NY Age: 37	Artist; documentarian; former public school teacher; curator; instructor	<i>Radio Transmission Ark, Ghetto Biennale</i>	Acoustic ecology, sound and radio arts, race and culture
<b>Cassie Thornton</b> Born: Wheeling, IL Lives: Oakland, CA Age: 32	Non-profit administrator; teaching artist; artist; curator	<i>Feminist Economics Department, Physical Audit, Beauty Salon</i>	Emotional and fiscal debt, institutional critique, security and beauty
<b>Caroline Woolard</b> Born: Jamestown, RI Lives: Brooklyn, NY Age: 30	Art organizer; artist; facilitator; designer; administrator	<i>Trade School and OurGoods, BFAMFAPhD, Exchange Café</i>	Mutuality, cooperative systems, solidarity, labor, gender and embodiment

**Figure 2. Participant Portraits**



### **Pre-Interview Survey**

To initiate the project a survey was sent via email to each artist. The survey included ten questions exploring each artist's positionality, educational history, views on art and education, and approach to art making. Most participants answered each question in a few paragraphs, sharing anecdotes and accounts throughout. The results of the survey provided background and contextual information that was used to structure interview questions during each mushroom hunt (See appendix for full list of questions).

### **The Mushroom Hunt - Interview**

In total, four mushroom hunts were organized. The locations were selected by each artist in a proximal location to where they were living or working at the time. The table below provides the location and duration of each hunt. After scheduling each session, an initial meeting was organized and I provided transportation to the site.

**Table 4. Duration and Location of Mushroom Hunts**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Rob Peterson</b>	<b>Cassie Thornton</b>	<b>Caroline Woolard</b>	<b>Kate Clark</b>
<b>Duration of Interview/Travel</b>	7 hours	10 hours	8 hours	7 hours
<b>Hunt Location</b>	Ramapo State Park, NJ	Bear Mountain State Park, NY	Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY	Sharpe Park, Anacortes, WA
<b>Date</b>	June 16, 2013	June 20, 2013	July 20, 2013	July 22, 2013

In Russian literature, mushroom hunting often represents love of family, freedom from tyranny, and a connection to the sacred and an escape into the unconscious. While most mushroom hunters seek the elusive bounty of wild edibles, others are interested in the discovery of unknown species and the thrill of the hunt. Regardless of motivation, the

practice of hunting for mushrooms requires a deep sense of concentration, moving slowly through a forest landscape, and sensing everything around you. The form of the mushroom hunt was chosen specifically because of its capacity for meditative reflection, providing a means to engage each artist deeply and a space to ask open-ended questions.

To support and further (un)structure this process, I created a tool that I refer to as a “mycowheel”. The mycowheel was inspired in part by John Cage’s own use of the I-Ching, imagined as a “chance-based compass” that could disorder questions used during each interview session. Measuring approximately 5.25 x 5.75 x 3 inches, the mycowheel has a spinning arrow attached to a faceplate in the shape of a spore print. Surrounding the spore print are four categories including self, other, concept and context, which are used as thematic guides for specific interview questions created for each participant (see Appendix for full list of questions). On the perimeter of the faceplate are 64 hexagrams that represent I-Ching characters that represent messages or fortunes for one’s life journey. Cage used this to inform many of his musical compositions, which notably included a collaboration in 1951 with pianist David Tudor called *Music of Changes*.

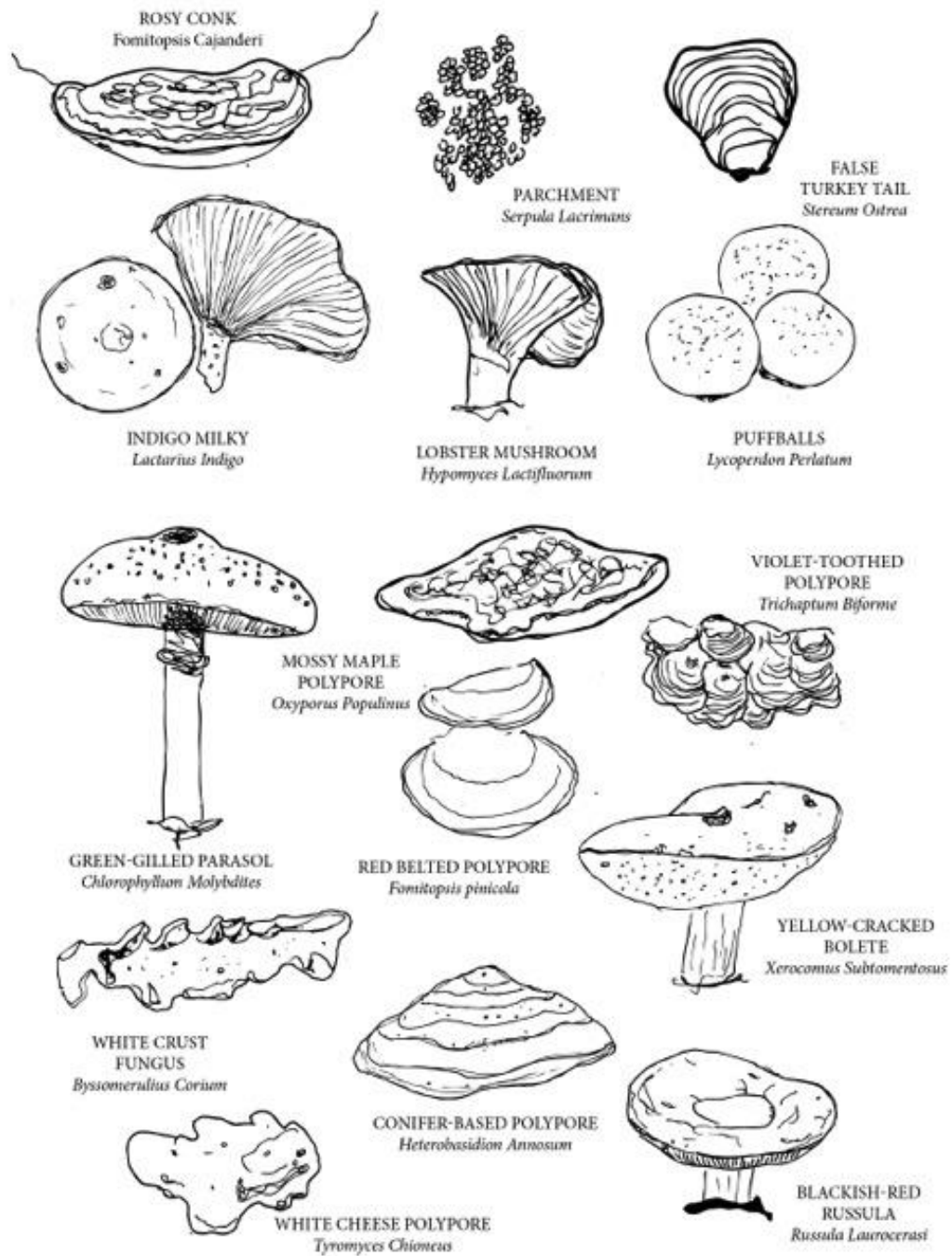
To use the mycowheel, a participant is asked to spin the dial and answer a question, while also receiving I-Ching reading. Once we arrived on site, I asked each artist to spin the mycowheel to initiate a line of inquiry. This introduced an element of chance from the very beginning of each conversation. Once a question was chosen and asked, we began to move together along trails looking for fungi and using a voice recorder to capture the conversation for future transcription.

**Figure 3. Mycowheel**



While the pace of the walks tended to be causal and slow, the hunt for fungi provided an opportunity for disruption and indeterminate maneuvering through various questions and trail paths. As we walked along, a mushroom sighting would engender excitement and the conversation interrupted as we both peered at various specimens. When the conversation reached an impasse, I would ask each participant to again spin the mycowheel so that we could begin to engage another line of inquiry. This occurred on average at least 3-4 times throughout each walk. Finally, the identification and collection of mushroom specimens was not necessarily a primary goal of the hunt, but rather the pursuit of mushrooms metaphorically offered an opportunity for intimate engagement and experiential encounter.

**Figure 4. Mushroom Specimens Collected During All Four Hunts**



## **Focus Group**

A focus group with all four participants was organized 2 months after each interview to gather reflections from each session. This conversation was first mediated through an email exchange asking participants to share any thoughts about their experience and then a follow-up conversation brought together all four participants to share these reflections via Skype. The focus group conversation was overall convivial and casual, participants noting their enjoyment of the mushroom hunt and a desire to continue talking about issues related to art education. Yet, as Woolard pointed out, the loose structure of the interview was difficult to approach at times:

It was a strange mix of serious and I-miss-you-why-haven't-we-been-together-for-a-while. I felt nervous and I was in a strange place. I liked that you were willing to meet me where I was at, to wander without going on a wild hike, and I think we had an honest conversation. My concern is that it was so loose that I didn't know what to focus on...

Peterson in contrast noted how the mushroom hunting format provided a space to share and discuss issues meaningfully:

Using the mushroom hunt as the foreground for a deep, oxygenated, living, conversation that uses all the muscle groups is totally amazing... Please continue to hold us accountable, hold art accountable, hold knowledge to your heart like a sacrament. Please keep doing this in the woods and the roads and the abandoned transgressive spaces in our world. Please keep me in mind next time you go on a mushroom hunt.

The focus group also provided a place for participants to come together and share common experiences and frustrations in their work as both artists and organizers, echoing the concern for institutional accountability, equitable pay, and affordable housing.

Overall, the question of what can be done to address issues brought up in the project, led to reflections on local conditions and an overall ethic of care and mutual respect necessary to drive further collaboration and change in both the fields of art and education. While the session only lasted about an hour, each artist was able to fully reflect and share in thoughtful ways that brought this phase of the project to a close. A summary of these reflections is discussed in Chapter VI.

### **A/r/tographic Inquiries**

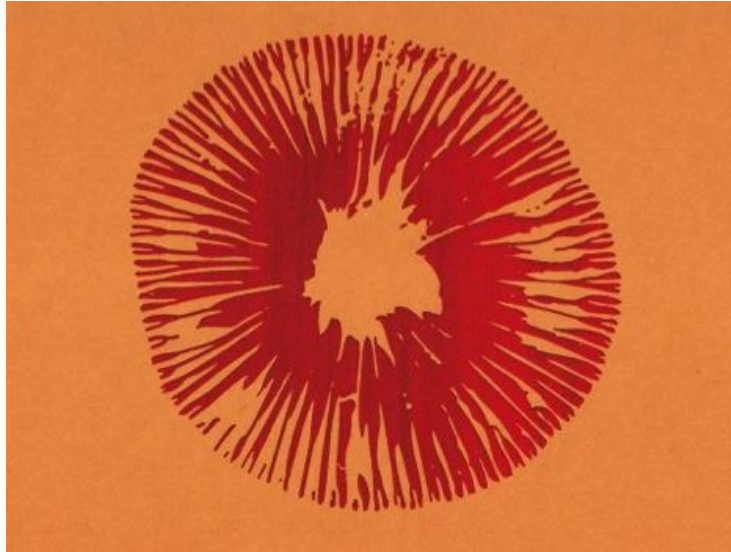
Throughout the project, forms of a/r/tographic inquiry, visual and conceptual art making were integral methods. This resulted in a collection of screen-printed mappings based on the lines created through each mushroom hunt (“mycographies”), crochet works that mimic the shape and pattern of mycelia, a collection of textile-based sculptures, and a final video work. To share and allow for a more immersive experience of the project, an accompanying exhibition was organized to display artifacts and invite continued dialogue around issues of art education, mycology and social art practice. The following section explores these elements more in depth.

### **Exhibition**

To share artworks, process and writings developed during the study, a small exhibition was organized at the Center for Creative Writing in the Arts on the campus of University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The exhibition displayed art, video works, artifacts, and images created during the project, including a live performative reading of poetry by John Cage. Although the format of an “exhibition” is problematic in many

ways, I consider it an opportunity to facilitate further dialogue and understanding about the experience of teaching artists through real-world encounter and conversation.

**Figure 5. Sporeprint Silkscreen - 6.5 x 4 in.**



While my initial vision of an exhibition was not to display artifacts from the project solely, my proposal for a more interactive show was met with hesitation. I originally proposed to incubate mushrooms and host workshops inside a gallery space on UNCG's campus. After circulating this proposal, it was deemed too experimental and was not able to use the student union art gallery, the Gatewood Gallery, or the lobby of the Weatherspoon Art Museum. Eventually I was able to work with Amanda Wagstaff at the Center for Creative Writing to host a small show. Yet, even here the director has asked me not to “damage” the walls with any nails or hooks. While I have found navigating this disheartening at times, I am excited to make-do and forge a space for connections nonetheless.

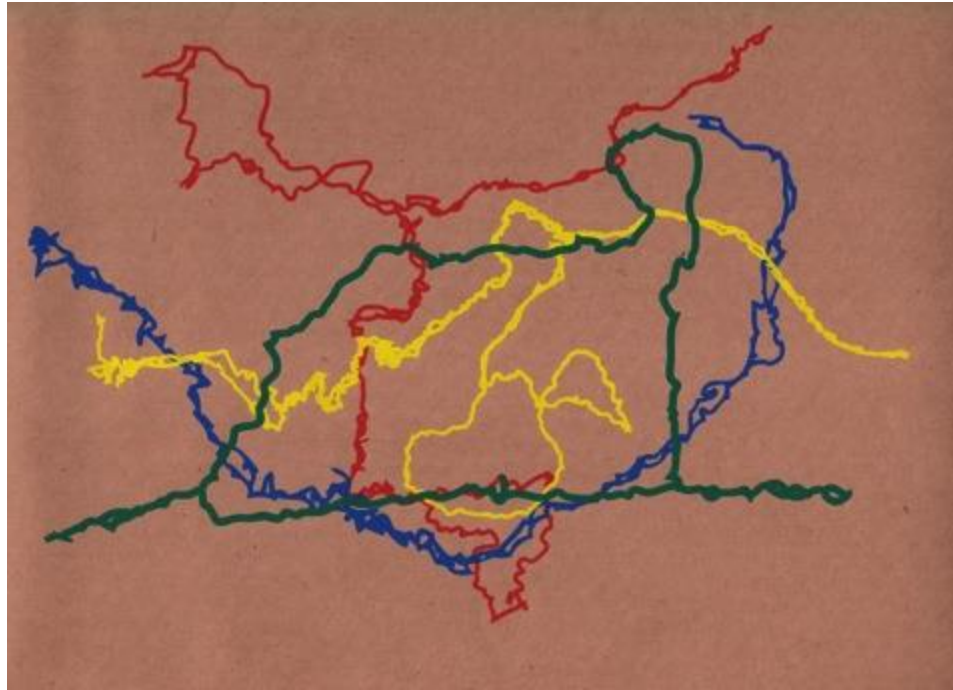


## **Mycography**

In her work *The Indeterminate Mapping of the Common*, Doina Petrescu (2006) explores Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) use of "lines" as a device to map our un/conscious movement through social space. Deleuze in particular draws from the work of Fernand Deligny (1970), a French educator and psychiatrist who lived with autistic youth throughout the 1950-70s. While conducting surveys that traced participant's movement and behavior, Deligny discovered patterns and logics linked to these lines. Deleuze (1996) characterizes Deligny's work as a "geoanalytical" process that draws relationships between the body, psyche and everyday life. Petrescu argues this is a form of place making, using mapping and the language of tracing to produce new experiences and knowledge of a place.

Drawing from Petrescu's analysis, mapping and mark making were imagined early on as useful tools for visually representing relationships between art, learning and education. The mushroom hunts in this sense would provide not only a means for conversation, but also a material for creating conceptual maps in response to each encounter. As such, I intentionally set out to trace the lines created during each mushroom hunt and record images, video and sounds of the walk along the way. The idea was to provide the viewer and participant a way to access each walk sensorially and consider how the mushroom hunts offered a new awareness of place and opportunity for indeterminate dialogue.

**Figure 6. Mycography Silkscreen - 11.25 x 17.5 in**

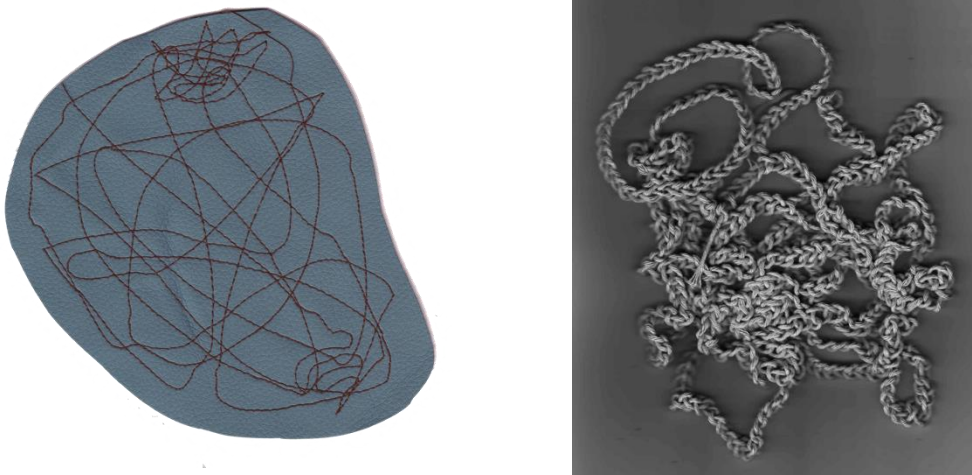


To trace the lines from each walk I used a GPS mapping tool on my phone to trace the itinerary of each walk. The lines generated were exported into a design program and layered together to create what I refer to as a “mycography”, a connected web that resembles the network of mycelia or the root structure of fungi. My initial plans were to link this map to an online interface that would allow audiences to click on each line and open randomized pieces of media connected to each walk. After reviewing the possibility of creating an interactive digital map with colleagues it was deemed too costly and difficult to create. In lieu of this, a limited series of silkscreen prints (pictured above) were created to visualize the experience of each hunt and the knowledge that emerged through these encounters.

## **Crochet Sculptures and Drawings**

During the thematic coding and interpretation of stories gathered throughout the project I also began to create drawings, textile and crochet works as a way to reflect and meditate on readings and interview sessions. In the textile-based works, the practice of sewing became a way to depict rhizomatic relationships and mycological metaphors. These works start as large amorphous shapes cut from various fabrics or paper and are then stitched in randomized circular patterns using a sewing machine. The stitches themselves become marks or trajectories connoting the complexity of intersecting ideas and a continued exploration of mycelia webs and networks. I would often find myself making these artworks when I had reached a point of impasse with writing and reading of certain texts. I also found myself crocheting with various fibers, allowing for an opportunity to further meditate and reflect. As I began to accumulate a collection of these crocheted works I began to imagine them as a larger sculptural work that could be installed as a “mycelia mat” plunging from the ceiling of a gallery space.

**Figure 7. Rhizome-inspired Textile Sculptures**



### **Media and Video Work**

During each mushroom walk a collection of images and video were collected to document each experience. The camera used was a small hand-held device, easy to place in my pocket. I mostly hid or did not bring attention to the camera throughout the walk to avoid any fear or hesitation in answering questions from each artist. The collected footage is imagined as a way to access and piece together the four walks that uses the indeterminate compositions of John Cage as inspiration. Collaborating with musician/artist Anna Luisa Daigneault, we rolled several dice to determine a chance-based pattern for creating indeterminate music and then layered sounds recorded from each walk to create a soundscape for the video. The final work is a looping composition that offers viewers a way to access the mushroom walk and conversations collected.

### **Reflexive Inquiries**

Finally, personal reflections throughout the project were shared on a digital blog and collection of physical journals to further document my research process. These reflections often took the form of poetic texts that help to situate a particular thought or inquiry. I often found myself feeling lost, confused or perhaps uncomfortable in facilitating exchanges with friends who were also research participants. A journal and digital blog provided a space to work through some of these concerns and record my process along the way. I imagine this as a digital archive that provides the viewer photographs, diagrams and journal entries to share reflections and thoughts gathered throughout the research process. This resource is available at <http://mycologicalprovisions.tumblr.com>

### **Positionality**

Our positionality is influenced by a range of socio-cultural and political constructs, and shaped by our own subjectivity and experience in the world. The “West” is a concept itself, prescribing a rational language and criteria for knowledge and learning. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) points out the consequence of Western philosophy and its set of epistemologies, is that they are intricately embedded in racialized and gendered discourses that privilege predominantly middle-to-upper class, white, heterosexual Christian men. This she explains, influences our own system of beliefs, morality, our sense of self, and construction of reality. The practice of research extends from this Western view of knowing, making it integral to any research endeavor to locate and understand our positionality and how this affects an inquiry. In recognizing this as integral to any research process, the following section explores some of my personal story and assumptions linked to this study.

### **Confronting Assumptions about Art and Learning**

I grew up in the era of Reaganomics, of capitalist accumulation and a deepening divide of wealth. My parents were both college educated and pursued careers in engineering, making the rigors of science and rationality a guiding theme throughout my childhood. I grew up with two brothers and a sister in a relatively middle class household in suburban New Jersey and attended Catholic schools for most of my life, exposing me to a particular Judeo-Christian orientation of schooling and discipline.

School for me was a place of fear and shame, and verbal and physical violence. I was ostracized for a seemingly feminine demeanor and told I was going to hell by

teachers and peers for my unwillingness to change my sexual identity. Throughout my childhood I lived in middle to upper class white neighborhoods where race and class were removed from most conversation. After high school, I had the opportunity to go to college where I studied environmental engineering. This was not my chosen field of interest, but rather something my father insisted was the only valid reason to pay for an education.

It's here in the circumstance of science that my passion for art and education grew. As I reluctantly finished my senior year, I began to realize the change I so desperately wanted to see in the world would require a different path. As I peered deep into the social justice rabbit hole, issues of education and learning were a central concern. However, as I began to work inside schools, it became apparent that education harbored its own set of issues linked to a cult of accountability, inequitable distribution of resources and focus on reading and math.

When I moved to New York City, I started to live with artists and educators who shared my concern. Through their work I was exposed to a radically different language of expression and creativity that seemed to open possibilities. Yet, my entry into the art world was in many ways incidental and haphazard. I never took classes in art history, nor learned art technique, but rather found my way to art through people and a sense of belonging they extended to me. This roundabout way of entering into art discourse shielded me from many of the problematic realities and assumptions made about art and its capacity for social change.

In conducting this research I've found myself confronting many of these assumptions. I have come to realize not all art experiences are positive or meaningful for everyone and that art is incredibly nuanced and connected to issues of power. What's more, socially engaged art is not always "art for the greater good", and art education can be just as ineffective and standardized as other disciplines. I now know the artworld, as with other institutions, is a place of inherent privilege. It is classed, raced and gendered in extraordinary ways. The work of the Guerrilla Girls, whose projects began in the 1960s, are still relevant today as people of color, women and other marginalized groups are restricted access to both creating and sharing art with publics. The institution of education works in collusion with and at the same time against these art worlds, affording certain students and teachers access to art experiences over others.

Today as a queer-identifying man living in the Southeastern United States I continue to hold a great deal of power and privilege determined by my identity as a white artist and educator. As a researcher, this privilege is complicated by a Western discourse of positivist inquiry. In many ways, this circumstance necessitates an ongoing interrogation of my own positionality, questioning for instance: does this research have a particular agenda to celebrate art education? Does it assume the work and practices of artists are positive and transformative for communities? And is there an assumption that this work can be imposed onto other situations and contexts?

Through personal reflection and critical inquiry I've sought to address and confront many of the assumptions brought to this project through the use of critical theory and feminist epistemology. This extends to the selection of participants and

previous relationship with each artist that impacts the trustworthiness of my analysis and data collection. While reflexivity will never be sufficient in fully addressing many of these concerns, my hope is the stories of others will provide inspiration and more questions to further interrogate what art education can and should be. Here I hope this research may take on a relational and indeterminate dimension as something necessarily incomplete and unfinished.

### **Participant Connections**

Over the past several years, I've had the chance to work collaboratively with the four artists included in this study. We've met through chance encounter in different ways, forming friendships and ongoing collaborations. Cassie Thornton and I met one evening at a bar on Flushing Avenue in Brooklyn, NY after she saw a handout for a project I was working on. We would go on to become studio mates in 2009, eventually collaborating on a project called School of the Future, an intergenerational free school that ran for one month in an abandoned park in North Brooklyn.

I met Caroline Woolard while working as a research assistant at New York University for artist Natalie Jeremijenko. In 2008, we began working with mycologist Gary Lincoff and other artists on a project called StrataSpore, a movement research investigation exploring issues of sustainability in NYC through the lens of fungi. It's here that my love of mushrooms began and continues today. In 2011, Rob Peterson was invited to become a curator for Elsewhere, a living museum and artist residency program in Greensboro, NC where I also currently work. Together we worked with 5 other artists to run the museum and artist residency, and have stayed in touch since. Finally, Kate



Clark and I met in a Lake Michigan lagoon in 2008 at Ox-Bow, a residency and arts program organized by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. We continued to stay in touch, brushing paths in New York after I invited her to participate in the School of the Future project as a visiting teaching artist.

### **Participant Challenges**

My previous relationship with participants was both an asset to the project and also an ongoing point of critical reflection and worry. This previous knowledge provided a space for intimate conversation and dialogue, as well as point questions that considered my own personal understanding of their work and practice. However, this also impacts the trustworthiness of data. To address this, my aim was to remain critical in the development of inquiries and research methods, and professional in contact and association throughout the course of the study. In working with each artist, I also asked difficult questions, probed deep into personal matters, and questioned interpretations along the way. This became a fragile interplay, as I did not want to fracture or damage any pre-existing relationship, but also needed to assure a critical examination.

There were issues to confront throughout. In my walk with Peterson for instance, his personality as a grand storyteller often dominated the conversation. I found myself having to interrupt and revisit comments or ask questions that may have had nothing to do with what was being talked about. Although agitated at times, this allowed me to work past any tangential conversation. In July the temperatures also rose to above 100 degrees, prompting me to rethink my mushroom hunt with Woolard in NYC as a smaller excursion that involved air conditioning and ice cream. Woolard was also involved in a

large project at the MoMA and getting ready to move her studio to Queens, making it difficult to find time to connect and schedule an interview.

In working with Clark I became aware of some of the differences in experience that age and time in the field demonstrated. I found myself confused by some of her comments about privilege, race and the role of the artist. Yet I tried to remain distanced and probed deeper into the broader social and political contexts connected to her work. While many challenges continue to persist (ie. writing about friends knowing they'll eventually read what you wrote) there have been a number of synchronous opportunities as well.

Before initiating the project for instance, a pre-established degree of trust with each artist had already been formed. This enabled me to setup a more experimental framework for each interview, and the ability to ask pointed and specific questions about projects I had a working knowledge of but didn't fully understand. Through these pre-established funds of knowledge and trust, a kind of accountability emerged, enabling this project to become more than an individual endeavor but a collaborative journey that includes the voices of friends and colleagues in the field. This allows for continued conversation and dialogue about art and education as each participant's practice evolves and changes over time.

### **Further Reflections**

After working on this project for nearly a year and half, I find myself reflecting on the limitations of research and the solitary journey of writing a dissertation. I started this process with a number of hopes and dreams: to create art, explore the theory of social

practice and art education, and share the stories of colleagues experimenting in the field today. While this has provided a number of meaningful exchanges, I now realize I have only scratched the surface of something that will take the rest of my life to fully understand.

I have also come to realize my own limitations as a researcher and scholar. Initially I imagined this project in a number of forms, as a digital experiment that would layer media, stories, images and texts to mimic the form and behaviour of a mycelia web. I wanted to transform a storefront space in downtown Greensboro into a mushroom incubation laboratory that would host workshops and collect stories about art and education. I dreamed of creating multiple publications: poetry, collaborative essays and conversations from teaching artists around the country. I wanted to install art around the halls of the school of education and start a mycological society that celebrated the work of John Cage. I wanted to build a geodesic dome on wheels that could house a teaching artist residency program. While some of these dreams have come to fruition, the demands of this qualitative research study have proved to be a formidable challenge that reduced the scope of the project considerably.

I have also come to realize the practice of research itself places one in an incredibly vulnerable and emotional space that wields immense power. This is complicated by the expectation of sharing research within a Western language that demands clearly formatted margins, a clear purpose and explanation. While my intention to use fungi as a means to (un)structure this process has proven useful in some respects, it is unfortunately insufficient in many ways. I now recognize, the true value of mushrooms

is something metaphysical and spiritual, a “non-thing” that cannot be described with words. As I prepare this document for final review, I am hopeful that my intention to confront my own personal assumptions about art, learning and research are communicated throughout. In many ways this has been a harrowing and yet rewarding journey where the preface is now written, but the rest of story has yet to be told.

## CHAPTER V

### SPORES

Chapter V brings together the stories of four contemporary artists experimenting with socially engaged art practice and public pedagogy in the field today. The accounts offered here were gathered during a series of mushroom hunts with each artist conducted in the summer of 2013. Using interview transcriptions, observations, and surveys collected from each session, this chapter explores several works from each artist, weaving theoretical analysis throughout to consider these practices in context.

#### **South: Robert Peterson**

A mushroom hunt and interview with Rob Peterson took place on June 16, 2013 in Ramapo State Park, New Jersey. The duration of the mushroom hunting excursion was approximately 4 hours, and travel to the site an additional 3 hours.

#### **Journal Entry: A Return to the Ramapo Mountains**

We arrive just after 2pm, pulling up to the trailhead of Ramapo Mountain State Park after a traffic-filled adventure across the George Washington Bridge. The park is 25 miles west of New York City in Passaic County New Jersey, once home to the Ramapough Mountain Native Americans. Surrounded by heavily trafficked highways and dense urban development, the 4200-acre park unfurls amidst rock formation and mountainous river streams surrounded by abandoned mine shafts. In the 1960s, the Ford Motor Company dumped several thousand tons of paint sludge and toxic materials into

the mines, threatening the ground water for several adjacent communities over several decades throughout the region.

As we pile out of the car Rob has already walked up the trail ahead of me. Rob, as always, seems poised for adventure. I hurry to catch up. As we progress into the forest I realize the trail is much rockier and vertical than expected. There is little opportunity for us to walk side by side. It's also Father's Day, and a whole trove of families wander with fishing rods, coolers and water rafting equipment. As we climb up the trail, I quickly try to catch up and slow things down as I scan the forest floor for fungi and begin our session. I ask Rob to spin the mycowheel. It lands on "self" and I ask Rob to talk about growing up in Louisiana and his experience of school.

### **Rob's Story**

Robert Peterson was born in Shreveport, Louisiana where he lived with his parents and sister, attending parochial schools for most of his life in the Northwest Diocese. Born in 1977, Peterson from an early age was fascinated by sites of re-enactment like Colonial Williamsburg and Old Sturbridge Village. Taking trips with his sister and mother each summer, Peterson says he was enamored by the performing of history, making paper by hand and blacksmithing, expressing an interest in experiential forms of learning. At the age of five, Peterson says he knew he wanted to be an artist. Inspired by the classical works of Auguste Rodin, he realized that art "creates a kind of epicness, that continues to keep future generations inspired to be truly human...".

After high school, Peterson attended the Savannah College of Art and Design, studying graphic design and working for a small firm after graduation. Frustrated by the

business of design, he decided to pursue teaching, getting a job at a local school in his hometown of Shreveport. While there, Peterson was a history teacher and football coach. He describes this experience with a mix of trepidation and zeal, explaining confrontations with the administration over content and style of teaching:

I was teaching United States history and I was trying to teach them that like the railroad industry and the annihilation of the American Indian was connected. And I mean those people were far from pleased...

After a year of teaching, Peterson decided education was not his primary calling. He went back to graduate school attending the University of Georgia in Athens, and shifted his energies toward sculpture and media production.

Today, Peterson is a practicing artist and documentarian living in Queens, New York. He describes himself as a “maker of primary documents of human life on earth and a cultural performer and producer” (Peterson, 2013). In many of his projects there is an interest in telling stories about people from different cultures, investigating what he calls “cultures in peril”, architectural history, southern music, art history and biodynamic farming. There is a pedagogical drive to this work, interested in an active critique of America and its colonial history. He describes this as a desire to add to the annals of art, while exploring his identity as an American from the South.

When asked to reflect on the institution of education, Peterson mentions what he refers to as “the lure of specialization” as a concern:

The central problem of education in the West, in the developed world is this tired focus on specialization. This tired Lyceum philosophy...a wall between anthropology and ecology, anthropology and bioscience...School systems are

rusting World War II era submarines, with holes in them. Kind of facing down into the ground. You know what I mean, they're not even boats, there's not even an above water thing anymore. There just like slowly taking on water...still in the dock. They're not even anywhere interesting in the abyss of the ocean.

In his most recent experience as a teaching artist, Peterson worked inside an East New York middle school as a video instructor to co-lead an afterschool program. While there, Peterson collaborated with a group of youth over several months teaching them how to create and edit short films. He asked students to answer the question, “Who am I...Who are we”, as they created self-guided video tours of the school mixed with interviews and conversation. In talking about his experience, Peterson describes a world of bureaucracy and frustration common to artists who enter the world of afterschool programing: very little pay, mountains of paperwork, performance rubrics, sign-in sheets and no training.

**Figure 8. Mycography of Robert Peterson**





This sentiment is echoed in his reflection on art schooling. Peterson describes a problematic model and ethic of individual practice and competition:

Art education is the saddest of all educations. Because they've been taught to think that its ok to just go in your studio and clock in and make some pretty shit and that's your contribution. That is bullshit.

Peterson explains there is a need for art departments to become spaces of interdisciplinary research and creative response. What we don't need, he cautions, is another "sculpture in a park". Instead, he encourages a shift toward transdisciplinary collaborations in Universities and public spaces that harness the capacity of artists to imagine new worlds and potentials. Peterson talks about this as the central crisis for art education, while also criticizing a recent wave of social practice that has abstracted many of the aims of post-studio practice.

RP: Oh what is that?

CK: It's a polypore um looks like a red striped polypore. Probably been here for at least a couple of years or so. And this is a decomposer.

RP: What kind of tree is this?

CK: Probably a red oak. Ya you'll see a lot of mushrooms on oaks. You can see some relationships between lichens and moss.

RP: Symbiosis.

CK: You can see the pores here instead of being gills.

RP: Also a bug on it.

CK: Uh huh. Oh bug...we want to save you. It's a habitat for this little one.

## **The Ghetto Biennial**

In 2009 Peterson was invited to participate in the first annual *Ghetto Biennial* in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, organized by a collective of sculptors known as Atis-Rezistans, led by Jean Hérard Celeur and André Eugène. As a community of artists and craftspeople along the Grand Rue Avenue, they describe their practice as a form of collage that explores a “dystopian sci-fi view of the future and the positive transformative act of assemblage” (Atis-Rezistans, 2013). Celeur and Eugène organized the *Ghetto Biennial* to invite artists, filmmakers, writers, and photographers to work with their community and produce a collaborative show at the end.

When asked about this experience, particularly in relationship to issues of race and privilege, Peterson begins to discuss the historical context of colonial encounter in Haiti and how these issues linger on today. He explains the surrealist movement in the 1920s and 30s left behind a legacy of artful intervention and imagination. Yet, these contexts are often ignored:

...it is common to think that in Haiti they must regard art as a privileged thing, because only privileged people participate in America...The common misconception is that the third world is broke and that people are starving and so art must be low on the totem pole, which is not the truth.

While Haiti may be filled with the detritus of a post-industrial global economy, Peterson describes a playful resiliency in the Haitian people, pointing out how everyday material is transformed into a bricolage of creative response, informing the way people build homes, travel and create public space. There is a kind of ingenuity and beauty that Peterson talks

about with great zeal and explains is still evident today despite a devastating earthquake in 2010.

As Peterson continues to reflect, he shares some of the concerns with the intentions of artists that participated in the *Ghetto Biennial*, describing them as a group of “first world disillusioned artists” who had been overly schooled in critical theory and neo-Marxism. Although Peterson would not fully explain his skepticism of the *Biennial*, its clear in his body language and tone that something was amiss. The framework of the *Biennial* itself, inviting a group of outsiders into a specific community that has historically been oppressed, harbors a number of neocolonial undercurrents that point to issues of power.

When asked to talk about his involvement, Peterson first describes a project by Carol Frances Lung called *Made in Haiti* to characterize some of the practices and ideologies at play. Appointing herself “special envoy to Haiti’s apparel workers”, Lung proposed using “Pepe” as a resource for “creating a sustainable garment industry” (Lung, 2009, para. 1). Pepe is a slang term for second hand clothing coming from first world countries like the U.S. and Canada that is then resold in local Haitian markets. Lung was interested in using this as the material for garments that would be created by local tailors and seamstresses and then sold back to people in the U.S. She describes this as:

...collaboratively instigating Haitian textile workers to repurpose used garments from the west, turning them into fantastically, shabby couture apparel, and exporting them back into the United States. (Lung, 2009, para. 2)

As Lung arrived in Haiti she began to visit Pepe markets and setup a makeshift studio with Jonas La Base, an artist and painter. Lung's initial strategy was to create a communal system where everyone would be considered equal, sharing in the labor and profits of garments produced. Peterson explained the reaction to Lung's project at the market the next day:

Those people looked at her and said, lady we don't want to be your colleague. We need a job. The tailoring industry is dead because of Pepe. We haven't been able to participate in any vibrant market in 35 years. We don't need to be your partner, we need to be your employee. Are you going to make this business work or not?

**Figure 9. Carole Frances Lung at Pepe Market in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti - 2009**



Shaken by the response Lung asked colleagues for advice. Cameron Brohman, another Biennial contributor, was nearby as Lung shared some of her initial setbacks with the group. Peterson says Brohman told Lung she was missing the point. Removing hierarchy

from the production of garments is not going to change the pre-existing system of global capitalism. Brohman encouraged Lung to acknowledge that people needed jobs, and not comradeship from an outsider. The more interesting and complex aspect of the project is related to issues of transglobal power, especially in the ways the fashion industry has re-marketed urban “ghetto” culture and poverty to the masses. As Peterson explains, Lung needed to acknowledge and deal with this reality and critique this oppressive system, or to reject it altogether.

While Lung eventually found a small community of people to work with and produce garments, the lingering sense of authoritarian exchange masked as a communitarian gesture continues to define the project. We need to understand there is a particular set of subjectivities present in her intention and desire to make work with the people of Haiti, and how her privilege and power as a white outsider influences this desire. In designating herself as a “special envoy” without the permission of the Port-Au-Prince community, she makes a number of assumptions about the Pepe market and the people who participate in it. Namely, that they need her financial help and expertise, and they would welcome a new communitarian system. Here Lung is engaging in a practice of “ethnographic self-fashioning”, positioning herself as an equal, and at the same time as someone who can lift a community out of poverty (Clifford, 1988). Grant Kester (1995) refers to this as a form of “dialogical determinism”, simply replacing “a vulgar Marxist concept of economic determinism with the equally reductive belief that...dialogue has the power...to radically transform social relation” (pg. 21).

During his time in Haiti, Peterson produced a series of photographic essays and field recordings for the Biennial to create what he calls an “audio sculpture to engender a dialog from which both cultures can take away something meaningful” (Peterson, 2009). In the recordings and photographs shared, they provide a glimpse into the Grand Rue community. One image captures an ornately painted bus known as “Tap-taps” decorated with murals of footballers, pop stars, saints and other icons. Another image shows artworks made from the melted housings of abandoned television sets described by Peterson as a “post apocalyptic wall of gargoyles” at sculptor Ronald “Cheby” Bazile’s studio. Audio recordings and video clips capture the rhythm and intensity of street life, interlacing stories and interviews throughout.

**Figure 10. Documentation of Ghetto Biennial - 2009**



When asked why he is attracted to working in places like Haiti and Jamaica, Peterson describes a desire to share the stories of people and cultures foreign to his own experience. He refers to this as a form of documentary or cultural ethnography, naming himself a “cultural producer”. Although Peterson partially acknowledges some of the

problematic issues bound to ethnographic practice, Peterson joins a long lineage of artists, anthropologists and archeologists who perhaps unknowingly “exoticize” the other in pursuit of a particular agenda. The framework of art biennials have long supported this tradition, inviting artists and curators to transpose artworks onto a space often without contextually framing or attending to local conditions. This “worlds-fair affect” is an inherently privileged space that only certain publics can access, while reifying an ethos of competition and critique within the artworld. While I expressed my suspicions about the concept of the *Ghetto Biennial* early on, Peterson seemed reluctant to admit this framework may be flawed and that placing it in a historically oppressed culture would present challenges.

Peterson instead expresses a kind a passion for the vibrant cultural ecosystems of Port-Au-Prince, pointing to ingenious forms of bricolage, architecture and social exchange. It’s clear that Peterson finds these spaces intoxicating and wishes to share these experiences with others. Yet, in so doing he makes an assumption that this particular community or site needs to be recognized and documented, and that this can be accomplished through the context of an “art biennial”. While the lure of discovery or cross-cultural exchange is used to rationalize these endeavors, anthropologists still marginalize historically oppressed cultures by accepting them as a prop for art production, science, or “research”.

Hal Foster (2003) explains the observer-participant dynamic of anthropologic study is thrust onto the “other” here as an artist investigates a culture of alterity. In this relationship, the other is always considered outside the dominant culture, which becomes

the focus of subversion. Foster (2003) describes a kind of romanticism with fieldwork that results in this “ethnographic self-fashioning”, where “the artist is not decentered so much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise” (pg. 306). This ethnographic authority presumes power over an audience as they interpret and translate a site through a Western lens. Convinced they are providing a needed service, the artist absolves themselves of any accountability and privilege in their desire to represent a cultural moment so the Western world can marvel in the intricacies of difference.

In Peterson’s project he displays a tendency to over-identify with what he calls “cultures in peril” and may further alienate the very community he desires to work with in the process. Here Peterson seems to express an aspiration to understand “otherness” by placing himself into a culture foreign to his own experience. Yet there is a possibility of unknowingly fetishizing this other in the process. If Peterson truly wants to share stories from people who live in Port-Au-Prince, the biennial organizers need to make his own positionality and philosophical positioning known and then assist him in entering into this community with a long-term vision of engagement and collaboration.

Wandering around with a camera and audio recorder, while appearing as a seemingly harmless act of tourism, can easily manifest as an act of symbolic violence if the images and media recorded are used to further one’s artistic career or represent a particular culture without consent or input. The capacity to “engender meaningful dialog” between *Biennial* participants and Grand-Rue sculptors thus requires a cohesive framework for enabling these stories to organically emerge. What’s more, Peterson needs



to wrestle and explore questions like: Who gets to tell these stories? How and where will they be shared? Who decides what is meaningful? And how will stories be framed?

A true “intercultural” exchange requires Peterson to become vulnerable and accountable to a particular group of people, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with this community over time. Could Peterson for instance have worked with a local school or asked youth to take pictures of their home and offer family portraits in exchange for sharing stories? Is there a music community that could benefit from having access to recording equipment? Is there a need to document Port-Au-Prince when there is already a several local newspapers and photographers living and working in the city? Why are there no self-portraits of Rob in the collection of works created?

While many of these questions may have circulated in Peterson’s mind, he may not have had sufficient time or resources to address them through his project and visit to Haiti. The Biennial itself, while framed as a space for intercultural exchange, appears more as a precarious experiment in poverty tourism, rather than a “third space” to explore the complexities of race and class in Port-Au-Prince. What’s more in refusing to acknowledge or carefully negotiate these issues, the *Ghetto Biennial* continues to circulate a myth about the “other”, rather than offering an equitable space for expression.

RP: What is that?

CK: That’s a puffball... when you slice it in the middle....if its not white in the middle it means there not edible.

RP: Ohh...

CK: That's good...but its dried out and probably cause you a stomach upset. Ya it's a polypore...white flesh in the there. Beautiful. Sometimes you can find these up to three or four feet.

RP: Whoa.

CK: And you can cook the flesh with a little butter.

RP: Wow.

CK: Ya super amazing.

### **Journal Entry: Exploring Off-Path**

As we continue to walk I notice a few mushrooms along the way, but avoid stopping so that our conversation continues to flow. We find some turkey tails and other shelf fungi but Rob doesn't seem very interested. We keep ascending and Rob suggests we go "off-path". Perhaps this will aid our mushroom hunting pursuits, yet as we wander off the trail I can tell right away we won't find mushrooms in this direction. Too rocky and dry, and not the right kind of habitat.

I suggest we find somewhere to sit and lead us to some rock formations jutting out just past the pond. I pull out the mycowheel again and ask Rob to spin the dial. It lands on context and I ask a question about *Radio Transmission Ark* and its relationship to social practice. He doesn't respond right away, but eventually begins to philosophize about culture and politics in the 21st century. I sit entranced. Rob is an orator. A storyteller and comedian. Loud, and pronounced. Southern as hell. He gets the paradox of postmodernism in a way that is so curious. I listen, laugh and respond sparingly for nearly an hour.

### **Radio Transmission Ark**

In January 2012, the Honfleur Gallery in Washington D.C.'s Anacostia neighborhood hosted Peterson and his partner Lindsey Reynolds for a month-long residency in connection with the exhibition *Visual Audio: Inquiries Into Found Media*. For the show, Peterson and Reynolds created a project called *Radio Transmission Ark*, which they describe as “an Internet-based sound art platform created to encourage explorations in locality and self-representation as well as potentials for broadcast art” (Peterson, 2012). Peterson and Reynolds proposed setting up the radio platform inside the Honfleur Gallery to broadcast stories from the neighborhood, inviting publics to be guests and broadcasters.

Located just across the Anacostia River, Anacostia was one of the first suburbs of Washington D.C., known in the mid 1800's as Uniontown. Frederick Douglas famously called the neighborhood his home purchasing an estate called Cedar Hill, which ironically was owned by the neighborhood's developer who prevented African Americans from owning land. The neighborhood is still predominantly African American and working class, however new development and rezoning are rapidly gentrifying the area.

While on my way to New York, I had the opportunity to visit Anacostia while the duo was setting up the project and conducting research in the neighborhood. To launch the project Reynolds and Peterson began a weeklong series of neighborhood walks, capturing image and sound, making maps and collecting artifacts along the way. Joining them on occasional walks, Rob is never without a field recorder and rarely misses an

opportunity to spark conversation with strangers. At the end of the week, they regrouped at the gallery and began to setup the radio station alongside an evolving installation of found artifacts.

**Figure 11. Radio Transmission Ark Live Broadcast – 2012**



The Honfluer Gallery itself is located along a public thoroughfare near the bridge that connects the neighborhood to downtown D.C. There is a steady flow of street traffic and a wall of glass separating the gallery from the street. The activity in the gallery is noticeable. As passersby stop in and ask what's happening, Peterson invites them in and starts up a conversation. This process eventually leads to a slew of community connections that will be used for ongoing radio broadcast. Peterson and Reynolds are also collaborating with Kate Clark, a teaching artist at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum to create a sound piece about Anacostia with a group of youth that live in the

neighborhood. *Radio Transmission Ark* will be used to broadcast the final piece during the *Visual Audio* opening.

Reynolds and Peterson used the Honfleur Gallery as a base of operations for over a month, broadcasting live most days through an Internet-based radio setup. In that time, they facilitated discussions ranging from the Underground Railroad and Go-Go music, to city planning and the mass of the human brain. Community members and invited guests were able to enter the gallery and join impromptu and planned broadcasts of the show, which streamed live at [arkradio.tumblr.com](http://arkradio.tumblr.com). This provided a space for aspiring musicians from the ArtLab including Dre “Just Dre” and TTK, to talk about living in the neighborhood and share some of their music. Another visit from Tim Rodgers of the Albus Cavus, a collective of artists, scientists and educators in the D.C. area, offered a space to discuss local art projects. Meanwhile oral histories about Anacostia and poetry from local artists were broadcast throughout.

In many ways, Peterson and Reynolds’s work pulls from the field of acoustic ecology, developed by R. Murray Schafer in the 1960s. Schafer’s (1967) research was focused on the dominance of “eye culture”, and how that affected our ability to listen and perceive experiences. Schafer and others developed a way to think about the sounds produced in an environment as soundscapes that expresses a community’s identity. In more recent work, efforts have been made to explain how music and sound inform place-based identification in embodied and idiosyncratic ways. While hearing is happening all the time for able bodies, listening is a more conscious activity that requires prolonged engagement, operating in emotional and psychological ways. The ways we listen, and

engage with a soundscape then effects how we construct meaning, respond and relate with the world around us (Wrightson, 2000).

Artists and media makers have experimented with acoustic ecology since the inception of radio at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of these artists consider their work in the realm of “radio art”, or art that is made through the medium of radio broadcast. This form of engagement investigates “the nature of language itself – speech as culture, and sound as language...” (Apple, 2002, para. 3). Radio artists are interested in imagining new realities and relationships, where the artist and audience can engage in what Paula Oliveros (2001) calls “inclusive listening”:

Listening thus sparks understanding by remaining open, susceptible, attuned to things outside oneself...listening weaves self and surrounding into a sympathy, to hear many places at once as one rather than many... (pg. 158)

As a durational performance and “archived soundscape” *Radio Transmission Ark* is able to open a space that invites publics to engage in a practice of inclusive listening. The work itself is a form of bricolage, making-do with stories and sounds available at-hand, and then broadcast through the neighborhood. This becomes an inherently pedagogical and public domain, allowing the gallery and the radio broadcast itself to circulate a set of practices and ideas connected to experiences shared.

While the project has well-meaning intentions, there are several issues of anthropological positioning to consider here. Firstly, access to the radio platform is dependent on an Internet connection or a physical proximity to the gallery. Secondly, Peterson and Reynold’s privilege as white artists, placed in a predominantly African

American neighborhood is also an issue. They use this privilege to gain access to spaces that may not otherwise be open to some people such as the gallery, the Hirshhorn Museum, and local businesses among others. While they do not make any overt attempts to exploit their positions, this tension is something that becomes a part of the project's narrative, but is not used to critique or call attention to the lingering history of slavery and oppression in the neighborhood outright.

Peterson and Reynolds instead celebrate the collective knowledge of neighbors, and community members that happen to pass by the space. This is of course tempered by the month-long time limit, determined in large part by the gallery's program setup and funding. Despite these logistical barriers, they secure a space that creatively facilitates an exchange of ideas and personal stories. The project in this sense becomes a rhizomatic network. One person suggests another person to talk with, someone hears a story related to something else, and the network expands and contracts over time. The nomadic derives or wanderings in the neighborhood provide a starting point for these connections to emerge, and the gallery itself becomes a popularized space where people may feel comfortable to cross the threshold as a storyteller or broadcaster. Here Peterson attempts to reverse ethnologic roles, recognizing the knowledge of community members as legitimate and integral to the construction of a narrative about Anacostia.

### **Discussion**

Throughout our conversation and from my personal experience working with Peterson, his zeal for progressive politics is evident. While his involvement in both the *Ghetto Biennial* and projects in Anacostia seem genuine, questions of ethnographic

positioning, power and representation linger. In his photographic documentation and sound recordings in Port-Au-Prince for instance, Peterson attempts to cultivate dialogue between community members, but the final work appears more as transient documentations that romanticize the gritty aesthetic of the Atis-Rezistan sculpture community. In many ways, a truly authentic dialogue requires Peterson and Biennial organizers to make themselves vulnerable through an ongoing recognition of privilege and positionality throughout the project. This could provided a space to recognize a number of “primitivist assumptions” made through the *Biennial’s* attempt at intercultural exchange, while also addressing Foster’s (2003) notion of “ethnographic self-fashioning”.

*Radio Transmission Ark* provides a more participatory structure for Peterson’s desire for dialogue to emerge, yet is only partially achieved due to the time constraints and physical location of the project inside a privileged gallery space. Despite these constraints, the project provides a community-sourced platform for storytelling. While this can “lead to the unearthing of repressed histories and help provide greater visibility to marginalized groups and issues...”, Miwon Kwon (2004) explains this can also “extract the social and historical dimensions of these places” to serve an institutional or individual interest (pg. 53). This places a responsibility on Peterson and Reynolds to understand their desire and intention for the project, and how their intended audience is included in the content and form of the radio’s setup. In reflecting on these works as a whole, it would seem Peterson is on the cusp of something quite interesting, yet the



exclusion of his own story and connection to these works often makes them difficult to approach critically.

**Table 5. Mushroom Findings - Ramapo Mountain State Park, NJ**

<b>Mushroom</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Yellow-Cracked Bolete</b> (Xerocomus subtomentosus)	A species of edible mushroom that occurs in autumn in forests throughout North America and forming a mycorrhizal relationship with a wide range of hardwood and conifer trees.
<b>Mossy Maple Polypore</b> (Oxyporus populinus)	This is a parasitic mushroom occurring in vertical overlapping clusters on trunks of living deciduous trees, especially maple trees, year-round.
<b>Granular Puffball</b> (Lycoperdon perlatum)	A species of puffball fungus that grows in fields, gardens, and along roadsides, as well as in grassy clearings in woods. It is edible when young and the internal flesh is completely white, although care must be taken to avoid confusion with the poisonous Amanita species, L. perlatum.
<b>Violet Toothed Polypore</b> (Trichaptum biforme)	Tough, hairy bracket fungus with violet edges and zones of white, brown, and black. The pores are whitish violet, breaking into teeth. Grows on stumps and logs of deciduous trees year-round.

### **North: Cassie Thornton**

A mushroom hunt and interview with Cassie Thornton took place on June 20, 2013 in Bear Mountain State Park, New York. The duration of the mushroom hunting excursion was approximately 6 hours with an additional 4 hours of travel to the site.

### **Journal Entry: Another Mountain, a Greater Climb**

As I prepare to meet Cassie I realize I'm already late, driving through NYC-bound traffic like a fiend. It's stop-and-go on the George Washington Bridge and the FDR Drive. After two hours of traffic I'm back in Williamsburg, a place I once lived

when Brooklyn was still a little cheap and not yet a reality TV sensation. I drive to the waterfront on North 5<sup>th</sup> and Kent where new condos have sprung up along the East River. My grandfather once told me his family farmed the very land I was now driving on. As I struggle to find parking, I find Cassie on the street. We embrace and convene by the river before beginning our journey out of the city.

**Figure 12. Cassie Thornton Mycography**



Several hours later we eventually make our way to Bear Mountain State Park, which extends nearly 5000 acres on the West side of the Hudson River just north of New York City and the Palisade Parkway. For thousands of years, the park was a key fishing resource for Native Americans, with 7-lb oysters lining the shores. A series of islands

created a tidal marsh that was colonized by Dutch Settlers in the 1600s, and currently the park is managed by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission. As we enter the park, we consult a map and enter a trail that leads up a steep mountain slope. Before we get too far into the woods I ask Cassie to spin the mycowheel. She spins and it lands on “context” and the I-Ching character meaning “Chi Chi” (after completion), indicating a movement from chaos to order is now complete. I ask her to talk about some of her latest projects and past experience in NYC as a teaching artist.

### **Cassie’s Story**

Cassie Thornton’s story begins in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois where she lived with her mother and a community of family friends. From an early age, Thornton expressed an endless curiosity and penchant for making things out of cardboard, household materials, and anything else she could get her hands on. She says she yearned for acceptance in school, excelling in mathematics to ensure attention from teachers. Attending public schools in Illinois throughout her adolescence, Thornton says she ultimately found school to be an uncreative and stressful place. Her home life and relationship with her mother was a challenge throughout her childhood, struggling with a number of family issues. This is something she rarely speaks to, but seems to infuse her sense of personal independence.

In 2001, Thornton moved to Madison, WI to pursue a BFA at the University of Wisconsin. Influenced by the work of graduate students and her own interest in poetic storytelling, she experimented with sculpture and painting, and small project-based interventions. During her final year in Madison, she organized a group show at an

abandoned ironworks, demonstrating a zeal for curating people, artworks and situations even as a student. After graduation she moved to New York City.

While in New York, Thornton's practice evolved alongside a desire to understand how the city worked. In one of her first experiments, Thornton found scrap textile material that she fashioned into a circus tent pulled by her bicycle, inviting people inside for intimate encounters. In other works, like Temporary Art Beauty Services, Thornton created pop-up nail salon experiences and re-created famous artworks on participant's nails while listening to their stories. To make money, Thornton began to work for a slew of non-profit arts organizations as a teaching artist including the Brooklyn Arts Council, the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and the NYC's Sports and Arts program. She describes this foray into the education world as transformative in many ways, allowing her to develop a collaborative work ethic and practice.

In 2009 she co-founded the Teaching Artist Union (TAU), a group of artists who claim teaching as a part of their creative practice. The TAU was formed in part by Thornton's personal desire to legitimize the work she was doing in schools, but also to collectively lobby for better working conditions and pay. In 2010, Thornton moved to San Francisco to complete an MFA at the California College of Arts (CCA) in Social Practice. There she began to investigate ideas of debt, creating an array of projects that are still ongoing.

Most recently, she's folded her practice into what she calls a "conglomerated self", using the title the *Feminist Economics Department (FED)* to house a series of

collaborative projects that continue her exploration of abstract belief systems and habits.

In a recent artist statement Thornton describes a:

...desire to dissolve a focus on her personal artistic identity and model the theoretical collectivity she advocates for with her art practice...a desire in response to an interest in debt and privacy, industries that promote individual liability, deny trust and interdependence. (Thornton, 2013)

Thornton continues to live and work in Oakland, CA where she earns a living teaching and organizing art projects.

CK: This is actually a lobster mushroom...it's dried out but it's an edible...

CT: It looks like a trumpety kind of shape...

CK: Like a chanterelle...like it's in that family...isn't it gorgeous?

CT: Ya what a color...ya I wonder what color it would turn when you dried it...have you spoken to Gary?

CK: Just via Facebook...he's like super into the Facebook...sometime I'll send him stuff and he'll respond within 20 minutes...but I keep meeting so many people that know him...

CT: How old do you think he is?

CK: He's gotta be up there...he knew John Cage so I mean he's gotta be like...because John Cage was like 40 when he was teaching at the New School.

CT: 150 years old...I guess John Cage would be 90...

CK: Actually it was John Cage's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday last year...

### **Feminist Economics Department**

Thornton is insatiably fascinated with institutions like schools, banks, and churches. Her intention as an artist often aims to understand how and why people

participate in these institutions, describing her practice as “the boiling down of epic institutions to just people and their beliefs”. Thornton refers to social systems as “idea forms”, explaining the more people participate in an institution, the more “real” it becomes. For Thornton, this informs the materiality of her artistic inquiries, invoking a kind of creative psychoanalysis that emerges in her exploration of desire, habit and routine. While her interest is not necessarily in disrupting these systems, she rather hopes to “give opportunities for people to think about what they actually need and want to believe in. And then to form new ideas forms out of that...”

**Figure 13. Beauty Salon at Ictus Gallery - 2013**



Thornton’s investigation of debt while attending CCA for instance, was motivated in part by the debt taken on by attending the program and moving to San Francisco. This resulted in a number of iterations. A project called *Wealth of Debt* proposed a new currency system based on the paperwork and receipts from student loan companies that

were re-shaped into “debt rocks”. She also created a debt choir with collaborator Amber Vistein (*Debt Sounds/Debt Chorus*, 2011), which used visualizations of debt manipulated into sounds and performed at Mass Arts. Thornton’s MFA thesis project took the form of a yearbook (*Our Bundles, Ourselves*, 2012) including stories and visualizations of debt from the entire graduating CCA class and a personal letter to the London School of Economics to continue her research.

In these projects, Thornton explains abstract systems like debt, security or beauty becomes a search for “realness” in our participation and acceptance of institutional beliefs and habits:

So I mean what I’m doing over and over again is teaching people how to teach themselves or teaching people how to observe these systems. Or better yet, teaching people how to locate their own desires outside of capital accumulation...I’m trying to understand what makes them real...

Her latest *FED* project, *Beauty Salon* at Ictus Gallery in San Francisco, invited artists to propose and provide re-imagined “beauty” services to the public over the course of a month. The menu of options ranged from somatic healing, to pedicures and facials that were actually opportunities for artists to satirize and parody the industry of beauty. Artist Bean Gilsdorf offered a hand massage that’s also a palm reading, while Megan Lavelle provided “Ann Rand Makeovers” that turned into a session for psychoanalysis. Meanwhile Marisa Prefer and Callen Zimmerman offered secret haircuts and invisible tattoos, and Ann Lorraine Schnake provided deep cleansing bodywork that was also a guided meditation including a reading of feminist texts. Through these experiences,

Thornton asks audiences to question their idea of beauty, providing a context for new practices and relationship to form through acts of play and humor.

In Thornton's latest project, the *Poet Security Force (PSF)*, she explores the security industry in a post 9/11 New York. The latest iteration of the project was hosted at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York, allowing Thornton and collaborator Byron Peters to setup a fictional security office inside the gallery where people were hired and paid to be security guards. Thornton and Peters asked guards to roam the city and write poetry about their experience in the form of "incident reports". Thornton herself trained to become a security guard, receiving her license while also investigating some of the dirty practices of the security industry.

Guards met regularly at the EFA project space to share their poems and talk about the idea of security in the context of everyday experience. The gallery space itself was transformed into a series of cubicles, mimicking the office setup found in security offices. Throughout the month-long project, a series of lectures provided a narrative for the project and an opportunity for security guards to share their poetry. Several days a week, Thornton, Peters and security guards journeyed into the streets of Manhattan to perform the act of surveillance, offering a public critique of security in one of America's largest cities.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) is connected to Thornton's practice in many ways. For Bourdieu, we all occupy dynamic social spaces, comprised of different fields with their own language and codes. Our position within these fields is determined in part by the kinds of social, cultural and symbolic capital we are able to accumulate and have



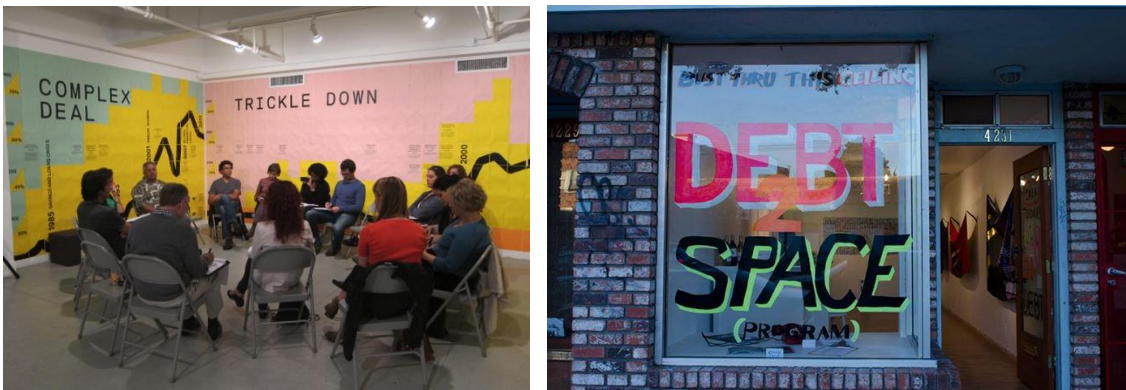
access to, as well as our general disposition or habitus within this field. The ways in which we obtain this capital are linked to structures of domination and power imposed upon us, connected to our race, class and gender. Bourdieu's early work demonstrated how social class, especially amongst the bourgeois and wealthy, is maintained and reified through institutions like formal education. This reproduction of power is what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence", an unconscious tendency to confirm our place within a dominant field and thereby reinforcing a social order.

In many ways, Thornton is interested in understanding the conditions of social and institutional structure and relocating our position and relationship to these spaces. To approach this "relocated self", Thornton breaks down an existing habitus for herself and the participant of a project, and then creates a new set of rituals or behaviors that help question positionality and power. This becomes a reflexive process that offers the audience a space to reflect on institutional oppression and imagines new practices in response.

In a project called *The Debt 2 Space Program* for instance, participants are offered an opportunity to send their debt and all of its emotional baggage to space where it can be imagined as something different than what it represents on earth. Thornton describes this as an "effort to export the behavioral, psychological and emotional ramifications of all types of financial hardship – from the fiscal landscape of earth to outer space" (Thornton, 2013). In an exhibition at Recess Gallery in Portland, Thornton collected and recorded screams from people suffering from debt via a toll free hotline and website [debt2space.info](http://debt2space.info). The collective screams were broadcast on a local radio station in

Portland, beaming the screams into space where they were “delivered beyond the debt ceiling (just beyond the ozone layer)” (Thornton, 2013). Thornton describes the act of screaming as a method to transmit “feelings of limitation”, providing an opportunity for people to confront and expel some frustration linked to financial institutions. (A recording is available at [soundcloud.com/cassie-thornton/debt2space-interview-and](https://soundcloud.com/cassie-thornton/debt2space-interview-and))

**Figure 14. To Have and to Owe Workshop and Debt2Space Program – 2012-13**



In providing a space to confront debt, Thornton attempts to invent a new language and myth around banking and the institutions that support it. Roland Barthes’ (1973) work on the issue of myth is theoretically useful in this respect. Barthes explains myth is a type of speech and a political device used to create “language-objects” that shape our beliefs and actions. Barthes argues the meaning (signifier) within a myth is something already complete, comprised of a past knowledge that empties itself when it becomes form. To create a myth, an existing sign is used to create new meaning and something that is signified. Through the performance of this speech, the myth takes on a fleeting form that is constantly transformed and altered over time. A myth requires a sign, a signifier and signified in this respect, created from a pre-existing semiotic chain.

Michel de Certeau's (1985) essay *What We Do When We Believe* is connected to Barthes understanding of myth. de Certeau explains what we believe is not necessarily connected to real tangible things, but rather we locate our beliefs in the signs and symbols we see in the everyday. Belief is a ceaseless flux of exchanges, premised on some value of difference. It creates an ongoing relationship to an "other", similar to Barthes notion of absence created by myth. de Certeau explains it is impossible for people to live without belief because it is located in our unconscious desires. This produces what he calls a "recited society", through which people believe what they see, and what they see is produced for them.

For Thornton the myth of institutions and our disposition to believe in them becomes a kind of material to work with and around. The industry of debt for instance perpetuates a number of myths that define our fiscal and social relationship to education. In taking on debt, we participate in a capitalist system and reify education as a private enterprise. By visualizing and critiquing our relationship to debt through participatory and performative projects, Thornton hopes to empower viewers to re-think this belief:

Over and over again different people are revealing that debt is imaginary...how debt is created and destroyed in the world, and how sort of fallible and corrupt that is and through that understand that its just made by people and inflated by people....what if through the unconscious we all imagine...what the material of debt would be, don't we also collectively shift its meaning? I don't know...the relation between our imagination and economic forms is so insane. And just showing that that exists, it creates some sort of malleability.

In giving the viewer agency to confront and understand debt, Thornton's projects take on a pedagogical dimension, using a post-formal strategy to uncover hidden systems and our relationship to them.

To accomplish this, Thornton draws from performance art to create embodied experiences for her audience. She explains, embodiment plays a key part in her practice:

...if you really want to change things you have to start with yourself and if you really understand something it has to go through your body and your experience...embodiment is really nine tenths of the law.

The use of performance is integral to a recent project called *Physical Audit*, which was performed in San Francisco and New York in 2012 and 2013. The project asked a team of dancers to visit banks and ATM lobbies and to place their hands on all possible surfaces to gather "dirt" from each space. Not the dirt of corruption Thornton explains, but the dirt from the accumulation of human skin, evidence that the bank is really just made of people. As the dancers interact with the space, Thornton's idea was to re-script and explore our physical interaction in banks, which are generally a very sterile, scary and solitary experience. Describing the project as an act of "civic observation", Thornton explains her aim was to facilitate new experiences and relationship to banking spaces:

So this idea of going and trying to find something dirty was about the relationship between our bodies and the mental and emotional experience of a place. What happens when you go limp, well you get kicked out but you also get relaxed...I was looking at the whole place upside down and I was like this place is like a bank but its also a space ship.

In reflecting on the project, Thornton explains each performance was a frightening experience but also transformative for participants, allowing them to express a feeling of alienation and fear produced by our relationship to money.

**Figure 15. Physical Audit at a Citibank in Manhattan - 2013**



Thornton also uses performance in her work inside K-12 schools. During the first session of an education program, Thornton will often begin the session with a performance to engage and intrigue students. In a middle school in Brooklyn, NY for instance, she pretended to have discovered radioactive meteorites in her backyard that she brought in for students to draw. She recalls explaining this to students:

Guys I'm sorry I'm late you will not believe what happened...I saw this thing like shooting through the sky and it landed in my backyard and I was like holy shit this is a meteorite. Do you want to see it...don't touch it. The oils on your hands might cause something radioactive to happen just keep your distance and draw it.

In another instance, Thornton dressed up as a cat burglar and stole all the stuff on a teacher's desk to launch an investigatory project all about evidence and criminal justice. She showed up the next period wearing something different and asked students to examine what had happened. In creating a moment of provocation, Thornton explains the oppressive routines of school dissolve, and students are able to participate more as autonomous individuals.

In these exchanges, performance is used as a device and material for embodied and pedagogical encounters. In projects like *Beauty Salon*, *Debt2Space* and *Physical Audit* Thornton uses touch, movement and a particular relationship to the body to produce an experience for the participant. Stephanie Springgay (2008) understands this as a kind of “inter-embodiment”, describing how experience is “bodied” and entangled with knowledge through our interactions in the world. Thornton like Springgay imagines the body and our awareness of it as a site of ongoing inquiry. While there is often some kind of mediated exchange involved, there is also some agency for the participant to explore and decide the level and meaning of intimacy created. This is not successful for everyone however, a privileging of able-bodies and certain publics attuned to this work are able to access it over others who may find it confusing.

In many ways Thornton's project are necessarily abstract, yet often so much so that we are left wondering what the intention and larger message behind her performative gestures and collaborative productions seek. The creation of fake institutions, businesses and services while humorous and satirical on many levels, do not carry the same kind of weight they once did during the anti-art movement of the 50s and 60s. Thornton also

seems unaware of her own personal power as an artist orchestrating these events, leaving the viewer to wonder what her role is beyond these performances. In the context of public education, her approach to teaching carries more weight because it actively confronts the dominant structure of obedience, control and hierarchy in schools.

CT: Man don't you just want to just sleep out here...

CK: Oh ya...lets go over here and see if we can find some stuff....Oh here go....we've got a brown waxy cap....oh and some cicadas....and if you can listen right now you can hear the wailing, that's the sound.

CT: Ya there's so many...

CK: Ya brown waxy cap...no veil....

CT: Oh my god remember the angel of death or whatever.

CK: Oh god that was the first mushrooms that I saw when we were out there and Gary was like that we'll kill you.

CT: Is it the angel of death or destruction?

CK: Ya angel of death but there might be another one like destruction...

CT: I love that...Putnam Bay Park was like my first solo mushroom excursion. I kept getting lost and then I'd find a mushroom and Id be like I'm ok, I'm cool.

### **Teaching is my Art Practice**

As a teaching artist, Thornton blends many of her individual art practices into a collaborative approach to teaching and learning with schools and students. Without any prior training Thornton began to work with groups of youth across the New York City in 2007, describing her first experiences as both challenging and transformative. She explains this work allowed her to understand her students as collaborators in inquiry-

based investigations, where her artwork became entangled with an emerging educative practice. Thornton describes this as a crucial turning point in her work as an artist, pointing out: “once I made contact with people...I didn’t really want to make stuff on my own anymore”.

**Figure 16. Planetary Performance at P.S. 271**



In talking about this transition, Thornton describes one of her first teaching jobs at a school in the Bronx, working with a group of predominantly African American middle school girls. As the only white person and teacher at the school, Thornton realized the need to change her initial lesson plans to reflect a project that would explore this reality. Instead of leading a series of workshops on drawing and illustration exclusively, she asked students to make puppets of themselves using found materials while also offering a space for art skills and techniques to develop. The puppets were then used to create a



performance inspired by their own stories of living in the neighborhood near the school and presented to other classes. This change of course allowed students to explore a politic of identity and race on their own terms, instead of merely prescribing a fine art technique that may not engage students holistically. However we need to understand Thornton is also making an assumption about the value of fine art practices and the needs of her students in many ways. In order for students to explore a politic of identity Thornton must first equip this community with skillsets and tools necessary to fully express how they feel about this issue. Learning how to illustrate, paint or sculpt for instance may empower students to share their story in ways that are just as valuable and critically engaged as a project-based approach.

As her work with youth continued, Thornton describes her pedagogical process from then on as a kind of “gut level decision making” and form of collaborative problem solving that she hoped would live on in the lives of students. Here she realized the school as a point of “access” to reach a broad network of family members, local communities and students. Yet, while Thornton embraced her new role and identity as a teaching artist, she also began to work and meet with artists who were frustrated by their work in schools. In 2009 she co-founded the Teaching Artist Union (TAU) as a time and place to work with other teaching artists in the field. At its height, the union garnered support from hundreds of teaching artists around the city, in many ways a response to precarious conditions created by cultural organizations that function on grant-based seasonal programming. This non-profit complexity, she explains, creates an environment that makes it difficult to find long-term and consistent work.

In a manifesto written by Thornton and submitted to the TAU group in December 2009, she attempts to define the potential meaning and purpose of the Union, examining the word “union” itself:

We do not work in a factory and we, at our best, use teaching art as a way to expand our own life practice. We do not belong to a common institution, but what we do have in common is much more substantial: we know how to facilitate creativity for other people...(Thornton, 2009, para. 4)

Thornton further positions teaching artists as “THE contemporary public artists” because they are often funded by public institutions and already equipped with an audience. She explains there is power in this agency, providing “a format for discussion, a laboratory for experimentation, and a chance to solve problems with a group” (Thornton, 2009). In need of a supportive network to sustain this work, Thornton explains the TAU was a place to honor artists who teach as part of their creative practice. The TAU also proposes a way to satisfy a tenuous relationship between art and the art education world:

By creating a relationship and a conversation between teaching artists, institutions, and the art world, we will contribute to a better understanding of art’s function in learning and accentuate the learning that is implicit in art (Thornton, 2009, para. 13).

While the TAU received support across the city, the project was met with some resistance. In meeting with TAU members, Thornton realized that not everyone shared her vision of teaching as an art practice. For many there was a need to separate this from their job. Thornton recalls a heated conversation with a TAU member who explained: “my art practice is my art practice and this was my job, don’t mess with that I’m not

interested”. Thornton says she realized a distinction between the labor of making art for oneself or a gallery, and the value of making art with a group of youth. The implicit rebellion of art, which confronts a traditional notion of “work”, is many ways deflated. Teaching is not viewed as a productive or creative space and therefore something that one must be paid to do.

**Figure 17. Teaching Artist Union Members – 2012**



Thornton says most of her colleagues started out working as artists in a studio, and teaching was secondary. This was the case for her as well, until she realized the school could be a platform to play with, subvert, and actually imagine an entire art practice around. For Thornton the school is a space of possibility, one of the last publically funded places often removed from capital enterprise. She however maintains a skeptical view of schooling in general, the idea of sitting forward, asking to use the

bathroom, and the rampant focus on job training has convinced her that schools aren't necessarily the best places to learn:

I feel like education could be better served if the school became more of a community center...like making banking public and putting that in a post office or a library and what if your school contained a whole lot of these different services and we all had an excuse to be at the school all the time...

While a deep divide between art and art education persists, some institutions are responding with socially engaged approaches to learning inside museum and cultural spaces (Helguera, 2011). When asked about the phenomena of social art practice, Thornton says she is both critical and seems open to these set of practices, warning the popularity in their use has decreased their value. Thornton situates this historically, explaining many socially engaged education and art practices emerged from museum education departments:

...the reason we became a genre was basically filling in the gaps that were created by museum and cultural funding...the MFA programs mostly started because they were so cheap they could already use faculty that were teaching in places and didn't require studio spaces. In museums they didn't really have funding put aside to develop their education departments, they were sort of undefined and small and a lot of us were teachers and so we worked in their and did crazy stuff because it was a like an unlimited space, there wasn't a lot of guidance or structure, it was like at the Whitney, one-Saturday-a-month-mania.

Thornton describes her experience working with museums as a teaching artist as something distinct from a typical artist commission. She explains museums were not equipped to properly frame and experiment with social practice projects, saying, "they were just hiring all these people and like saying do some art education".

Today, Thornton says the desire and value in for social art practice has increased and created a competitive landscape amongst artists and educators. The radical potential of working socially with a group of youth is now exploited as a particular form of social practice that can be commodified. While Thornton seems skeptical of this, she continues to participate in these institutions because they provide nominal support and a physical place to experiment with. As her practice evolves, her experience as a teaching artist is most certainly an ongoing influence that augments the pedagogical nature of her projects. This provides a space to not only reflect critically on the intended role of an audience, but also how knowledge can be produced and circulated.

### **Journal Entry: A Bear of a Descent**

Around 4pm we begin our descent from the peak of Bear Mountain. The conversation is waning as our knees suffer down a steep trail of boulders and rocks. As we make our way down, Cassie makes a run for the park lodge in a comic last-ditch effort to use all of her human energy. We find ourselves in a space that's been converted into a fancy hotel and decide to get iced tea and draw together. I ask her to diagram the relationship between art and education. She marks three sections – the Unknown, Institutions and the Known. We proceed to map relationships between the three. I think about it as a mycelia mat, a mushroom metaphor manifest. As the sun begins to set we begin to drive back to NYC.

I feel terrible about the return journey, we've been stuck in traffic for several hours. At this point I have nothing left to talk about, and Cassie begins to work on a project from her phone. As we arrive back in Williamsburg I reflect on our conversations,

which were deep at times, but also veered off into unknown territories. I'm not sure how I could have pushed Cassie any further toward something this way or the other, yet I fear it may not be enough. Still I know I've climbed a mountain with someone I love and feel exhausted in an amazing way.

### **Discussion**

In providing a space to confront and better understand our relationship to debt, beauty and security, Thornton's work experiments with approaches to performance art and social sculpture. She develops a post-formal approach through this work, exploring the eplicate and implicate contexts of institutions, responding with participatory projects that invite the viewer to reflect and reconsider their own agency and roles in these systems. As Thornton explains, the more people participate in an institution and embody this through their daily routines and rituals, the more real it becomes. de Certeau (1985) explains belief in institutions is based on an unconscious desire, motivated in part by the dominant signs and symbols we interact with daily. Thornton attempts to offer a new set of signs to construct and critique the myth of debt, using the body as a material and conduit for new and oppositionary practices to emerge.

While this process can be healing and humorous for some, it can also be difficult for the audience to approach and fully participate in. Carol Becker (1993) argues artists must be willing to "make certain vital connections apparent...to help the viewer through the work's complexity" (pg. 55). The *Debt2Space* project for instance allows participants to scream about their debt and then broadcast this into space providing a cathartic space for frustrated participants. Yet, the act does not make this debt any less real for banks,

and can be easily dismissed as a privileged or abstract form of performance art. Moreover, without any physical home base or long-term platform to engage with these issues and the counterpublics they create, Thornton’s work runs the risk of losing momentum and cannot sustain the critical community it seeks to cultivate.

Her work with the TAU and as a teaching artist in NYC further illustrates a tenuous relationship between the art and the art education world, while also modeling the possibility of teaching as an art practice. Thornton’s embrace of this field, informs the pedagogical approach and content of her projects, which consider people as a primary medium and source of knowledge to work with. The “success” of these projects and the public pedagogies they circulate, require the audience to have some degree of freedom and agency to participate and respond. Gert Biesta (2012) explains this is integral to ensure the pedagogical intention of an artwork is coherent and accessible. While Thornton addresses this in many ways, her own positionality and authorial power as an artist remains a crucial element to consider throughout.

**Table 6. Mushroom Findings - Bear Mountain State Park, NY**

<b>Mushroom</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Blackish Red Russula</b> ( <i>Russula laurocerasi</i> )	Cap red to blackish-red in center and pales towards fringes. Gills yellow/white, stalk white. Cap is about 3-4 inches diameter and is found in forest habitats.
<b>Gray Almond Waxy Cap</b> ( <i>Hygrophorus agathosmus</i> )	Characterized by a light grayish cap that measures about 3 inches in diameter, waxy gills, a dry stem, and the distinct odor of bitter almonds. An edible but bland-tasting mushroom. Laboratory tests have been shown to have antimicrobial activity against various bacteria that are pathogenic to humans.

<b>Lobster Mushroom</b> ( <i>Hypomyces lactifluorum</i> )	Technically is a parasite of other mushrooms, turning them into lobster mushrooms. Known as a lobster mushroom because of its red color and “shell” which is yellow and whitish inside. Typically found growing under mushrooms.
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### **East: Caroline Woolard**

A mushroom hunt and interview with Caroline Woolard took place on July 20, 2013 in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The duration of our mushroom hunting excursion and visit was approximately 8 hours.

### **Journal Entry: Manhattan is a Furnace**

I’ve been back in the metropolis of New York for several days now. As the week progressed, the temperatures have climbed to dangerous highs. The power outages are beginning and my body feels as though it’s melting into an endless puddle. As I trudge through the city, my synapses are sweat-logged and slowly turning as if a small Cornish hen rotating with juices dripping. As the sun sets, the dark provides some relief as the island of Manhattan appears as a glowing ember.

On the morning of July 20<sup>th</sup>, I make my way to the underground subway tunnels. Twists and turns of squelching metal and rubber, shaking metal boxes with quivering human bodies. I emerge in Prospect Heights, the land of bourgeois food and babies, and proceed to the home of a dear friend Athena Kokoronis where Caroline is housesitting and taking advantage of the available air conditioning. As I greet Caroline we assert our deliriousness from the heat, as we both express our delight in seeing each other as real bodies in time and space. It has been at least 2 years since we’ve seen each other by our fuzzy estimates. We imbibe water and ice, and ascend to a room where an air conditioner



unit shrouds us with cool air. Caroline tells me Athena's daughter was born in this very room. Twelve hours of labor, no drugs, just midwifery.

**Figure 18. Caroline Woolard Mycography**



Due to the severity of the heat, we decide to rethink our initial plan for a mushroom hunt in Peekskill, NY. Instead we compromise on a walk in nearby Prospect Park and begin the session indoors with a reading from my sacred geometry deck. I burn some sage and lay down a spread. The cards describe a future in which Caroline will confront some kind of duality. As Caroline reflects on the reading, I ask her to spin the mycowheel. It lands on “concept” and I ask her to talk about the latest iteration of *Trade School* and the concept of barter.

### **Caroline's Story**

Caroline Woolard's story begins on a small island in the town of Jamestown just south of Providence, R.I. Throughout her childhood Woolard and her brother attended the Wheeler School in Providence where she was able to learn the language of class etiquette, privilege and critical thinking:

The Wheeler School is a place where a test on Hammurabi's Code read: "Ask yourself a hard question about the reading, and answer it." Wheeler was also a place where kids got cars for presents. This mixture of critical thinking and class mobility continues to haunt me. I could've been a tobacco farmer...

Growing up with a mother who was a self-proclaimed feminist, Woolard says she recalls conversations about gender and equity early on. When asked why she became an artist, Woolard explains it has a lot to do with her struggle with identity, recalling a number of experiences in school and at home where she struggled to find a comfortable place in her own skin:

...I didn't really know what my sexuality was, not really having breasts and feeling ugly cause I didn't get my period until I was 17 so ya know. I look kind of like a boy, people would make fun of me for that...

Woolard explains the challenge to conform to a specific gender and sexual identity was a pressure she felt throughout her childhood. She describes an experience with one of her drawing teachers, a friend of Woolard's mother that had a same-sex partner. When Woolard realized this meant that her teacher was gay, she worried that friends at school would assume she was as well.

This seems to have signaled a turning point in Woolard's identity development as both an artist and woman. As she navigated high school, she recognized the world of art as an alternative space, an opportunity to come in contact with adults who actively looked and acted differently than other teachers. In her junior year she was able to attend a special art school in California called Oxbow where she began to develop an art practice focused on sculpture and performance.

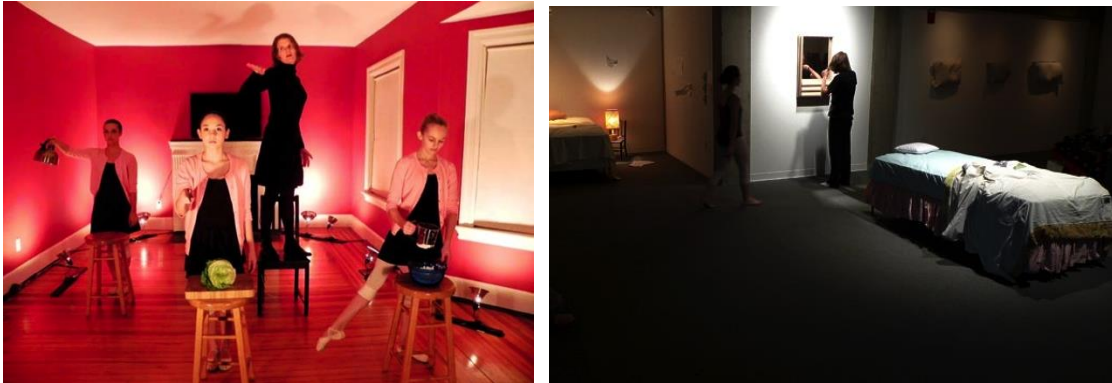
Woolard eventually moved to New York City, attending Cooper Union to complete her BFA. After graduation, she began to develop a collaborative art practice, starting an 8,000 sq. ft. studio space in Brooklyn with friend Christine Wang. Woolard describes her work as research-based and collaborative, typically making sculptures, furniture, events, and workshops for "critical exchange, forgotten histories, and plausible futures". She recently re-visited the Wheeler School to work on a project with the girl's soccer team, interested in exploring the dual identity of the artist and athlete. Woolard says she has always felt accepted and safe within the worlds of art and sport, and wanted to bring these two worlds together. She notes:

I actually move through the world in a specific body being framed and understood in specific boxes so ya I just think the girls soccer team is one of the few places in High School where I could be aggressive, have like a woman's space that had different rules and different ways of operating.

After starting to work on the project and practicing with the team, she realized her outsider status was too much of an issue. She was however able to create an exhibition in 2011 called *Dancing in Your Bedroom* with dancer Mary Paula Hunter, exhibiting the

material culture of bedrooms from students and allowing gallery visitors in the school to sleep, dance, and dream.

**Figure 19. Dancing in Your Bedroom - Chazan Gallery – 2011**



For the past several years, Woolard has been an adjunct professor at the New School for Social Research where she spends the first day of class opening up a conversation about debt and class mobility. Woolard says she prefers her role to be a facilitator here, interested in the idea of school as a place to follow curiosity:

I like facilitator better just because it's not so much about who has the authority, the information, and it's more about my responsibility and the reason you want to pay me is to make sure we can have commitments with each other...

Today, Woolard is pursuing a new project called *BFAMFAPhD*, which would create a community land trust near NYC to allow her and other artists to access affordable housing and start their own school. She has recently teamed up with a small group of students to launch the project, using the money that would otherwise go to a university institution to fund the purchase of land and construction of a building.

CW: Whoa these are some weird ones...

CK: Maybe there like shaggy manes?

CW: Whoa I had a creepy moment when I touched them.

CK: I think they may be edible.

CW: You know they love these wood chips...oh look at that mycelium. Oh that's so amazing. I want to pull up another one. I want to see a root system. That's amazing, its really happening. Smell it, it smells like button mushrooms...

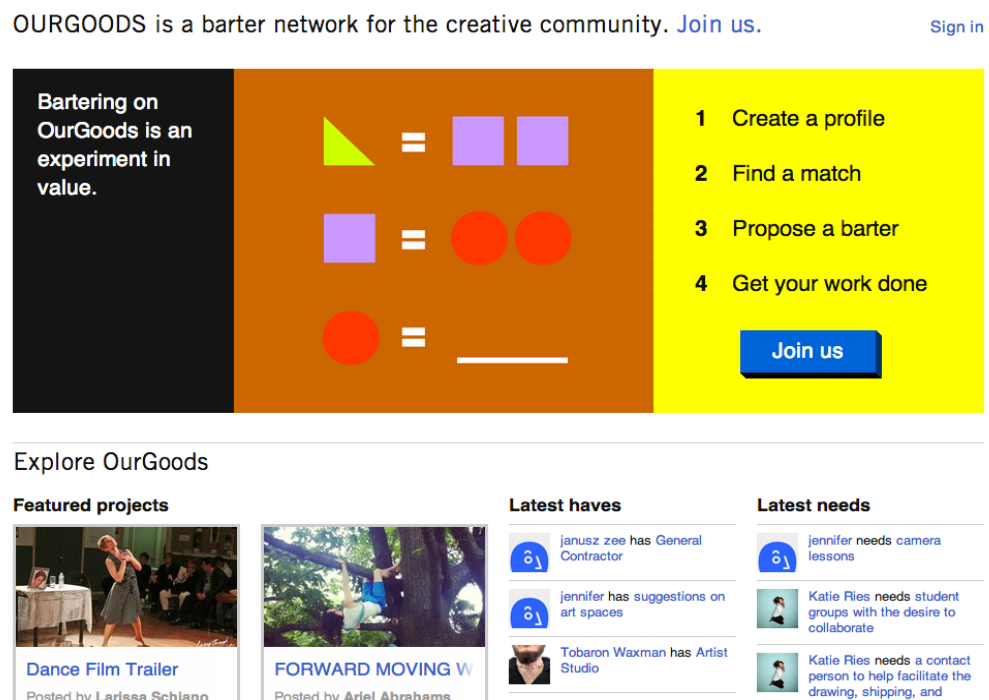
### **Trade School**

New York City is one of the densest urban centers in the world, home to thousands of artists making projects. With so many resources available, many things are possible but require certain forms of capital to make happen. Realizing the challenge of creative work in NYC, Woolard and a group of colleagues began to imagine a better way to collaborate and build relationships between peers. The group, which includes Rich Watts, Louise Ma, Carl Tashian and Jen Abrams, began to develop a project called *OurGoods*, a barter network for the creative community. The site provides an online portal at [ourgoods.org](http://ourgoods.org) for participants to post what they have and need, helping to facilitate the exchange of resources, time and skills between artists, designers and creatives without using money.

Launched in 2009 and focused geographically on NYC, *OurGoods* has facilitated hundreds of barter exchanges with an expanding network of creative people. In a typical exchange, a photographer may offer their documentary skills for help to setup a website, while a sculptor may need a raw material that someone provides in exchange for helping with grant writing. Unsatisfied with just an online interface, the group decided to create a

physical real world place for barter to occur. When they were given an opportunity to use a storefront space in the Lower East Side, the group launched a project called *Trade School* in 2010, an alternative self-organized school that runs on barter. The first iteration of *Trade School* invited anyone to facilitate a class or workshop and propose a barter exchange with students. The co-founders believe that everyone has something to share, celebrating ideas of mutual respect and practical wisdom.

**Figure 20. OurGoods Web Interface**



The first *Trade School* lasted a month involving 800 people and 76 classes and barter exchanges. Classes offered ranged from, How to Make Butter and Drawing for Pleasure and Relaxation, to a Meat Lover's Tour of Chinatown, to Baudrillard Camp and Pilates in a Chair. The premise became so popular that the *Trade School* model is being

experimented with in nearly 50 cities around the world, using [tradeschool.coop](http://tradeschool.coop) as hub to facilitate and archive each class and barter exchange. With a demand to keep the project going in NYC, *Trade School* was re-opened in 2011 with another month-long round of classes and barter exchanges.

In reflecting on the evolution of *Trade School*, Woolard says the project helped her realize the problematic nature of a “pop-up model” art project, and the collaborative work this entails:

So we realized at some point that we could never actually be an option for popular education unless we have a consistent space because a pop-up model only works if you have a really strong community partner that already has a public they’re looking out for... There’s no way to have a school if you can’t find it...

While the first and second iteration of *Trade School* brought together hundreds of people across NYC, Woolard says the need to develop deep and long-term relationships between communities is essential for *Trade School* to be meaningful. This takes much longer than a month and needs to include repeat classes to build and facilitate actual skills.

Issues of access have also been an issue, the project relying heavily on the Internet to facilitate exchange. For Woolard, this is linked to issues of class and privilege that she hopes a more permanent space for *Trade School* will help alleviate. She notes, unless the project is available long-term, it will inevitably become an institution “for precarious creatives who are probably educated, maybe have financial privilege...”.

**Figure 21. Trade School Session – Mushroom Hunting with Gary Lincoff - 2009**



In many ways, Woolard’s practice draws from a history of artists responding to labor and economic change after World War II. As the American economy began to shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, avant-garde artists responded by locating themselves within this system of capitalism and finding ways to resist in turn. As the rise of a new managerial class and immaterial labor took hold, art became a realm of ideas and not just the production of objects. Helen Molesworth (2003) explores this history in her book *Work Ethic*, noting how Marcel Duchamp and his readymades, as well as Roland Barthes’ (1967) essay *The Death of the Author*, provided antecedents to a new art that was “dematerialized, conceptual, anti-illusionistic, and anti-commodity” (pg. 29).

Duchamp’s readymades and Barthes’ essay stressed the possibility for art to exist outside of a singular author, questioning the autonomy of work when it was separated from the experience and involvement of the viewer. This in effect “problematized the role of the author/artist...by diminishing traces of their intentionality and subjectivity...”



(Molesworth, 2003, pg. 30). This change was also connected to the evolution of art schooling in a post-war America. The GI Bill alongside a modernist critique of art school curriculum initiating the increased professionalization of art programs around the country. The importance of drawing was replaced with a focus on art criticism and theory, and a shift from manual skill to intellectual labor.

As the social upheavals and rebellions of the 1960s gave way to situational and feminist works, artists like Frank Stella and Andy Warhol began to outsource their labor and in so doing changed the relationship between artist and viewer. Woolard points out this is a trend that has continued today, asking the question:

So what do you do when artists have been so professionalized that they look for recognition and money much faster and on an individual level and life for their own expression than maybe they ever had in history?

In his essay *Service Aesthetics*, Steven Madoff (2008) attempts to locate some of these movements contemporarily. Madoff uses Nicolas Bourriard's (1998) notion of "relational aesthetics", noting the emergence of artists making "socially relevant art outside the constraints of the market...broke the logic between labor and exchange value..." (pg. 3). Madoff explains the idea of providing a direct "service" as an artistic gesture activates a kind of individual agency and power within a social situation or context. Projects of this nature tend to be located within existing cultural spaces, where the idea of a service becomes a form of institutional critique and opportunity to examine the marginality of the service sector. Madoff however provides very little critical analysis

of these works, asserting the “aestheticization of service inflects this work toward social good, just as it underscores the usefulness of art” (pg. 5).

Andrea Fraser (1997) in contrast, offers a more critical perspective locating the notion of “project work” within forms of immaterial labor, which she calls a “service provision”. This refers to labor linked to advocacy and outreach, education, documenting, presenting and installing the art itself. She uses the term “services” to describe the portion of an artist’s labor that does not result in a transferable product. Fraser contends the idea of services have long resisted an attachment to industrial labor, and are frequently undervalued or dismissed in the creation of an exhibition or public artwork.

Similarly, Antonio Negri (2011) in his work *Art and Multitude* stresses the relationship between labor power and art making. Negri argues that because artistic activity is a particular form of labor it too is commoditized. As the worker becomes aware of his/her own place within a system of capital, Negri explains new subject “capable of demystifying the fetishized destiny” of capitalism emerged (pg. 80). This has resulted in new forms of abstracted labor power that is now immaterial. Negri claims artistic activity today has a particular ontological importance because “the relationship that exists between the one who acts and the one which is acted upon is deeper and deeper” (pg. 81). The new condition of a post-Fordist global capitalism thus demands a new language and understanding, especially in considering the increasingly exploitative valuation of cultural production.

In many ways, *OurGoods* attempts to critique and reposition the value of artistic labor by empowering individuals to set the terms and conditions of an exchange of goods

or services. This is of course a highly subjective activity, premised on a collectively determined valuation of time, materials or skills offered in each barter exchange. An artist for instance may offer sewing skills in exchange for photography, grant writing expertise in exchange for helping to promote an event, or carpentry skills in exchange for Spanish/English translation. The barter itself is not necessarily important here, but rather the space of possibility and agency afforded to participants. In so doing, Woolard seeks an ontological shift in artist's approach to cultural production, relocating their practice from an individual activity to a collaborative exchange that engages a "new model for valuing creative work". In opening a space of freedom where something new can emerge, *Trade School* takes on a pedagogical dimension, creating a site for public pedagogies to circulate through each barter exchange. In reflecting on the value of *Trade School*, Woolard notes:

And then they start realizing they have something really valuable to share with other people that is not money and it's about their wisdom or skills or experience or something they made.

However, while the premise of *OurGoods* and *Trade School* may appear ideal, facilitating successful barter exchanges is a difficult endeavor that Woolard attributes in part to the ethical challenge of honoring agreements and creating structures for shared accountability. *OurGoods* does make a distinction for instance between the act of gifting versus barter, noting a gift does not connote an expectation of reciprocity. This distinguishes *OurGoods* from other projects labeled as forms of "cultural gifting", which imagine art as "a gift passed on by the artist into the world" (Jacobs, 2002, pg. 4).

Woolard points out this can ignore the labor of artists and reinforces an expectation to produce work for little or no compensation.

Woolard points to the important of groups like Solidarity NYC, which aim to leverage resources and power infrastructures around the city to enable systemic and long-term resilience. She explains, “solidarity is recognizing that our fates are linked and bound up with one another...”. Woolard explains the idea of solidarity can re-imagine the economy as a kind of network of networks, where the time bank, the coop, the credit union and systems of barter link together and create a visible network that enables another kind of economy.

In working with Solidarity NYC, Woolard says she was able to learn democratic approaches to organizing and has started to integrate this into projects like *OurGoods* and *Trade School*. When the organizing team of *Trade School* noticed issues of class and access had become an issue, Woolard explains the group decided to discontinue the project until a permanent and long-term vision for the project could be secured. While this is a tentative negotiation, it does signal Woolard’s commitment to the broader community of NYC and democratic forms of collaboration.

CK: Wow...something. I see something. Whoa I see a log. But I see something else...some

CW: Polypores...

CK: Whoa those are kind of like puffballs.

CW: Whoa they’re hard...Whoa the sweat...so hot.

### **Journal Entry: A Hunt for Ice Cream**

Around 2pm we reach a stopping point in our conversation and break for lunch. A salad of quinoa and kale is made with currants and olive oil. After lunch we decide to brave the outside and go for a walk in Prospect Park in search of mushrooms and ice cream. We equip ourselves for the journey and begin to walk down Carlton Avenue and toward the park, past the Brooklyn Library and the arches of Grand Army Plaza.

As we enter the park we immediately spot mushrooms in a nearby pile of mulch, drooping from the heat. They look like “old man of the woods” or Parasol mushrooms, white and speckled with black flecks and wrinkly tops. Caroline almost seems grossed out by them. I’m in love. I can’t believe they are here in such heat! We journey on through the park as I ask Caroline to talk more about her identity as an artist and her work with Solidarity NYC. An hour or so into our walk, we begin to notice our fatigue and begin to search for AC. We follow along 7th avenue as we find a little shop that sells smoothies and coffee. From here the interview breaks down and we return once more to questions of love and what the future holds.

### **A Bronze Sculpture Performance**

While Woolard’s work around *OurGoods* and *Trade School* is ongoing, she is often invited to adapt this work into projects, lectures and workshops for museums and cultural spaces. A session of *Trade School* for instance was organized inside the Whitney Museum of American Art in the spring of 2011. Woolard explains the museum context unfortunately distorted the public’s idea of *Trade School*, noting issues of access and privilege as a challenge throughout. In reflecting on this, she admits, “museums are not

really a place for the blurring of art and life everyone hopes that it can be”. Woolard explains there is still an emphasis on having a solitary experience with an art object, where no crying, no laughing, and no arguments are allowed.

Woolard says what she is doing is not art with a capital “A”, describing projects like *Trade School* and *OurGoods* as artist service organizations that are supported in different ways by local communities. Yet, Woolard is okay with using the word art, if the word can change and is transformed by other artists in turn:

Ya take back the word art and don’t have it just be things that happen in museums and be responsible to shifting the culture of art and artists...and once you have the ability to be visible if you can show other ways to be artists, that’s really powerful.

In reflecting on the complications of working with institutions like the Whitney, she explains we need to explore new “temporal realities” to resituate the way art can become a place for pleasure, acceptance and love.

**Figure 22. Trade School at the Whitney Museum of American Art – 2011**



While Wooldard admits she is excited by the re-emergence of social practice to question norms, she also expresses concern with the cooption of “interventionist aesthetics”, which have become highly classed, raced and gendered. Wooldard says she is more interested in small audiences, providing skills for organizing that “add to long-term movements rather than short-term spectacles”. When a social art practice becomes “a hot dog and hi-five”, she admits this is problematic but signals a new kind of arts education that is not interested in maintaining a status quo.

The issue of time and deep engagement is something Wooldard points to as a key challenge in addressing this. In a historical sense art expresses a desire for permanence, and yet a contemporary urge for fresh and timely ideas. Patricia Phillips (1992) explains this puts the artist in a kind of double bind, where “this fresh spontaneity [is] made invulnerable to time, in order to assume its place as historical artifact” (pg. 297). In her essay *Temporality and Public Art*, Phillips (1992) argues the public sphere can be energized by the temporary, while a lack of specificity in public art is symptomatic of an over simplification of the public. Nato Thompson (2010) links this temporal tension to the field of social practice explaining it as a new age of accelerated time, a “spasmodic era of the twitchy and disinterested” (para. 11).

Some artists have addressed this directly in their work. Recent exhibitions by Marina Abramovic (2010) at the Museum of Modern Art and Sito Sehgal (2010) at the Guggenheim for instance, offered audiences a set of performative and durational gestures that played with a different sense of time in the museum. Thompson (2010) warns however, institutions like museums are inevitably coopted by market forces, making

experiments in temporality difficult if not impossible. He suggests we must look elsewhere for inspiration. He points to projects like the Copenhagen Free University and Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses in Houston, TX. Thompson describes projects like these in the context of a Deleuzian notion of becoming:

As sites of becoming, they go far beyond the gestural. Unwieldy, loose-knit, and often dealing directly with sites of power, they hold far more sway than the arts in producing collective social imagination. (Thompson, 2010, para. 4)

Similarly, Bojana Kunst (2012) also explores the issue of time, describing a contemporary cooption of the term "project" in cultural work and production. Kunst explains the term project has become an empty signifier, an abstraction of the process and products of an artwork. She describes this phenomenon as "projective time", describing the way in which artists are continually finishing and starting "projects" and the ways in which this influences an understanding of the future. As artists constantly create proposals for future work, their relation to present socio-cultural and economic circumstance is eroded. This in turn impacts an artist's idea of work as an infinite race where one must always be working toward an imaginary future horizon:

Temporality is at the core of the production of difference. It is the material of social and aesthetic change. It is precisely this potentiality that is diminished in many societies today, due to the administrative accomplishment of possibilities and as projective speculation of a planned but not-yet-lived future. (Kunst, 2012, para. 5)



Kunst (2012) explains this has resulted in a continual state of “experimental precariousness” in which the artist sacrifices the time of the present for a speculative relationship with a future yet to come.

In one of Woolard’s recent projects called “Exchange Café” (2013) at the MoMA in New York, she explains the issue of time and deep engagement were central concerns. Exchange Café transformed the lobby of the MoMA’s education building into a working café where visitors were encouraged to create their own currency in exchange for tea, milk and honey sourced from local groups and people in NYC (Milk Not Jails, Feral Trade Courier and BeeSpace among others). No money is exchanged, but rather skills, time, and resources are traded in exchange for services and items available at the cafe.

**Figure 23. Exchange Café at the Museum of Modern Art – 2013**



In reflecting on the project, Woolard explains many things didn't work. A lot of people were confused by the premise and angered that they couldn't use real money. Yet the larger issue according to Woolard, was time and deepened commitment:

...often these projects are so short term and the commitments between the participants and the organizers are so...tentative or precarious that no real relationship building can happen.

Woolard explains projects like these are marketed and structured as temporary spectacle, a month-long engagement with publics and then a stealthy exit. Woolard suggests that museums need to radically shift their idea of time commitments to artists and art projects, advocating for 5-year or lifetime projects that position and sustain deep relationships:

And so you have to have a bigger project that's something beyond your own art career if you're going to really engage people. Maybe people would say that's a bronze sculpture versus a performance. But I think we can have *bronze sculpture performances* that is the life project...

Woolard also links this crisis of temporality to the sphere of higher education, where an increased reliance on adjunct faculty and temporary contracts reduce the value and possibility for a long-term relationship with an institution. Woolard imagines schools instead as a place to spend one's life cultivating a deep knowledge for something and being supported in this process over time. This re-imagines the idea of tenure, using the university to develop skills and practices that cultivate a kind of institutional memory and developed thought:

...imagine if you had support and this intellectual project that I'm dedicated to I can develop for the rest of my life and share the progress with my students rather

than me just precariously putting a syllabus together that might get thrown out the window. Every year re-inventing it and no institutional memory, after my three years another random person will come in for three years. And then we have no in-depth thought...

By 2018, Woolard hopes to establish a community land trust with a group of “rigorous and generous” people that will assure access to permanent affordable housing for life. Woolard views housing as one of the central challenges to building an equitable and democratic creative community. Working with colleagues from universities across NYC, she is launching a project called *BFAMFAPhD* to create a platform to sustain and fund the purchase of land and open a school invested in solidarity and sustainable economies. The goal of the group is to create what they call a “cultural front” that brings together creatives across the country to leverage their collective resources and power:

We are tired of working, winning, and losing in isolated competition. Together, we can make a powerful cultural front. We can show up for each other, and for non-arts struggles, en masse. (Woolard, 2013)

With 1,827,087 BFA, MFA and PhD graduates since 1987 in the U.S., Woolard explains there are more artists than there are doctors, police officers and fire persons combined. What would it mean for these individuals to work together? The group is now accepting applications, and hopes to begin plans for the project by next year. As Woolard reflects on this, she tells me the most radical thing one can do is admit we actually have enough, and look beyond a reliance on disposable people and outsourcing of desire. She asks, “what if I just say no you have to actually take some time?”.

## Discussion

Woolard's work explores a number of issues that confront the complexity of cultural production and labor. Projects like *OurGoods* and *Trade School* are not just an example of institutional critique, but also unfold as a form of cultural resistance because they create the conditions for participants to imagine and enact oppositional practices on their own terms. Giroux (2000; 2001) explains sites of resistance are connected to power, and involve acts that oppose and offer a critique to dominant culture. In celebrating the collective knowledge and resources already in place, Woolard renegotiates power typically held by corporate entities and institutions, and relocates this in the hands of an evolving creative network of individuals across the city.

In many ways, this invokes Ellsworth's (2005) concept of the learning self, framing learning as something that is ongoing and located in the lived experience of participants through each barter exchange. This occurs rhizomatically where learning extends through uncertain moments and the collective valuation of time, skills and services offered to each participant. Knowledge in this sense is not something that is vertically transmitted, but rather each *Trade School* session provides a platform for "collective knowledge in the making" to manifest. What's more, the act of barter creates a structure of accountability between individuals, which inscribe an ongoing relationship with participants that has the potential to extend learning beyond each session.

Ideologically, *OurGoods* and *Trade School* attempt to confront and rescript our understanding of collaborative exchange and belonging, which Woolard argues is largely tainted by the discourse of art history. In creating the conditions for a new system of

exchange to emerge, these projects circulate a critical public pedagogy exploring concepts of solidarity and mutual respect. However, issues of access and privilege are still key concerns in the structuring and form of these projects. Woolard admits the pop-up model of *Trade School* made it difficult to build a long-term vision and community, which can be reduced to short-lived spectacles inside a museum or gallery space. In working alongside groups like Solidarity NYC, Woolard expands her status as artist and takes on a role as organizer involved in social justice movements linked to equity. Yet, in using the discourse of art and the institutions in her own projects, Woolard is implicated in structures of power connected to these cultural systems. As she wrestles with this tension, one is left wondering if these projects can exist outside of NYC, and if Woolard is simply exploiting the hyper-networked community of NYC and its vast wealth.

**Table 7. Mushroom Findings - Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY**

<b>Mushroom</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Dry Rot</b> ( <i>Serpula lacrimans</i> )	This fungus causes brown rot of wood (dry rot) and is most closely related to <i>Poria</i> and other wood rotting polypores
<b>Green Gilled Parasol</b> ( <i>Chlorophyllum molybdites</i> )	The green-gilled parasol mushroom thrives in urban areas and can be found in large numbers when it appears. It most often occurs in the irrigated soils of lawns, golf greens, drainage areas, and primarily lives off of grass clippings, and often occurs in fairy rings.
<b>White Cheese Polypore</b> ( <i>Tyromyces chioneus</i> )	A saprobic fungi that is solitary or grouped, sometimes overlapping or fused on decaying wood. It is found July through December and when fresh this polypore feels soft and watery and has a fragrant odor.

### **West: Kate Clark**

A mushroom hunt and interview with Kate Clark took place on July 22, 2013 in Sharpe Park on Fidalgo Island in Washington State. The duration of the mushroom hunting excursion was approximately 6 hours, with another hour of travel to the site and back. A total of 3 days were spent with Clark during my visit to Washington State.

### **Journal Entry: Holy Sage Canopies**

I've arrived in the Pacific Northwest for the first time in my life, landing in Seattle and making my way to Anacortes, WA. Today is grey, but the land is lush with a terrain of endless mountains and pine forest. The fiery inferno of New York now seems like a dream. Anacortes is located on the Puget Sound, and was once home to the Samish and the Swinomish tribes. The first white settlers were primarily farmers, hunters and trappers establishing an agricultural practice on Fidalgo Island. After an expected real-estate boom from railroad construction went bust, the now incorporated city of Anacortes became a destination for lumber and fishing industries. By the 1950s a majority of this industry was in decline, but kept afloat from nearby activity at the Whidbey Island Naval Station and a Shell oil refinery. The city slowly transitioned from a working class community to a destination for leisure, recreation and arts toward the end of the 1990s.

For our mushroom hunt, Kate brings me to Sharpe Park along the Montgomery-Duban Headlands, a 110-acre park with old growth firs and madrona trees. As we arrive at the park, the fog from the morning is beginning to burn off, warming the air and opening up the mountainous terrain around us. Before entering the trail we come upon a small meadow where I ask Kate to spin the mycowheel to begin our journey. The spinner

lands on “content” and the I-Ching character for movement. I also pull a spread from my Sacred Geometry tarot deck. The cards pulled reference a struggle with home and family. Kate reflects on the cards for at least 20 minutes. A hawk circles overhead and we descend into the coastal terrains and forestlands as I ask Kate to tell me about her project at Old Town San Diego State Park.

**Figure 24. Kate Clark Mycography**



### **Kate's Story**

Kate Clark grew up on Fidalgo Island in the small fishing village of Anacortes, Washington. From an early age she describes a fascination with other time periods where people grew their own food and wove their own fibers. Both of her parents are teachers, bringing her abroad to Eastern Europe where she attended high school for a year. While

living in Anacortes, Clark developed an ecological affinity with the island, identifying wild edibles, berries, birds and other local flora and fauna. She describes school as a nurturing environment, complicated by her mother's role as a teacher. After graduating high school, Clark says she longed to engage with the New York art scene, but was dissuaded because of cost. Instead she attended Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington where she studied visual arts. Evergreen is known for its progressive pedagogy that Clark describes as a kind of cross-disciplinary lab environment without grades.

After graduation, Clark developed a research and fine arts based practice navigating a role as teaching artist and artist. Her work often involves the subtle reintroduction or remixing of rituals, myths and stories in the form of sculpture, performance and installation work. In a 2008 project, she traveled to Pont Aven, France where she placed hand-made beeswax candles inside tiny compartments on city light poles as a re-contextualization of public space. In 2010, she helped organize the Knowledge Commons in Washington D.C. a floating free school open to the exchange of skills and learning around the city.

**Figure 25. Candles made for Lightpoles of Pont Aven – 2008**





Today, Clark is currently working on an MFA at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) in interdisciplinary sculpture and performance. In many of her recent and past projects, Clark's role undulates between fine artist, teaching artist and being what she calls a "citizen of the world". She notes:

I don't know maybe I'm more of a teacher than an artist.... I have to be careful with that because what will happen is the art, the part that isn't individual voice of me will get flattened for the greater good of something else, when I'm teaching...

When asked if she always knew she wanted to be an artist, Clark has some trouble responding, explaining she never felt certain but rather drawn to art because of meaningful experiences she had in museums and elsewhere. Clark says an object can still move her, where an interesting space between one's self and the object emerges. She claims a kind of a faith in fine arts practices of drawing, painting and sculpting, despite her own penchant for work that may be labeled as social practice art.

When asked about social practice, Clark seems suspect explaining these practices are no different from artists simply adapting to a new set of relationships and materials. However, she warns there is a need to be critical of social practice projects, especially ones that claim a particular history or conception of art:

...these kinds of projects often-times get supported without much rigor going into their unfolding. It's like oh great, you like to work with people and you knit. Go for it. Um but then I don't know, I think that it's been easier for us to think about it with the plastic arts, the fixed object in space...

In debating the ethical dimension of social practice art, Clark holds strong in her conviction to defend the fine artist and the creation of traditional art objects. For Clark

the studio space is a place for meditation for personal healing and not necessarily always intertwined with the commodification of objects produced by artists. When pushed to further explain her faith in fine art traditions, she mentions issues of economic survival as a key concern:

Ya, that's the thing...everybody has to survive and a lot of people that are working this way still have to make it, so they're getting hired in educational systems which then like your saying could perpetuate a different way of being a human...but the fact of the matter is there not going to change.

This challenge is something she continues to work through in her MFA program at UCSD, as she continues to collaborate on a number of projects, working with professor and artist Teddy Cruz and several other non-profit and museum spaces.

KC: What are they?

CK: It looks like an amanita, or waxy cap. I don't think its edible...So funny they can be like the size of my fist

KC: So it's all water?

CK: A lot of it...look at that one over there...

### **Old Town**

In 2011 Clark began to volunteer at Old Town San Diego State Park, using the park as both a material and site for performative research and art making. Old Town is considered the birthplace of California, the site of the first permanent Spanish missionary settlement in 1769, founded by Father Junípero Serra. The mission was located adjacent to the San Diego Presidio, a Spanish military outpost that closed when the mission re-

located. In the 1860s, a real-estate developer named Alonzo Horton shifted development of San Diego to the waterfront, prompting most residents to move to this new site. A fire destroyed the original Old Town in 1872, prompting the State Historic Parks commission to literally rebuild the site completely as a tourist destination:

In the transition from free land to heritage site, what was once a complex arena of colonialist development, plucky survival, catholic and Christian indoctrination, yellow fever, hard labor, genetic hybridization and erasure, became converted into a tourist scene of pastoral history. (Clark, 2012, pg. 6)

Today Old Town “commemorates” the Mexican and early American periods of 1821 to 1872 offering interpretive reenactments and living histories of the early settlement, alongside tours and shops for tourists to browse.

Reenactments like Old Town can take many forms, as a musical genre, religious tradition, scientific method, but differ from the idea of simulation through the awareness and exercise of agency. In the U.S., the idea of reenactment took the form of holidays, customs, pageants, and parades as a form of social protest against a bourgeois Europe. Robert Blackson (2007) points to the emancipatory potential of reenactment that may allow for artistic acts and performances that may otherwise seem impossible. He explains reenactment allows for an interpretation and interaction with a past that is both personal and historical. Blackson uses Roland Barthes (1968) notion of a “reality effect” to describe reenactment as a kind of “representation of the past through the form (history) we give to its reality” (pg. 31). Sites of re-enactment like museums perform a particular version of history that will inevitably hold some kind of agenda or hidden curriculum because the full extent of a history can never be told or replicated.

Reenactment as an art practice offers a chance to critique, subvert and bring attention to the partial histories of a place and its culture. A number of artists have used this as a method or strategy in their own practice. Nikolai Evreinov's *the Storming of the Winter Palace* in 1920 Moscow is an early example, while Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Ogreave* is one of the better-known contemporary projects to take on this task. In 2001 Deller chose to reenact a 1984 National Union of Mineworkers strike in Great Britain that led to a series of violent clashes with police. Although the reenactment was meant to provide an opportunity for reconciliation, Deller has been criticized for exploiting a series of traumatic events for a short-lived art spectacle.

Mark Godfrey (2007) notes in his essay *Artist as Historian* an increasing number of artists are using research and archival practices to situate inquiries and project-based explorations. Godfrey points out artists in the U.S. are "not so much concerned with examining repressed histories as with critiquing Hollywood representations of the past" (pg. 144). Some artists use fiction to recreate and embellish histories in an attempt to provoke a conversation about the present. Walter Benjamin (1936) describes this as a kind of "vanishing point of history", where time no longer exists, a place situated in the present moment. However, this can be a dangerous idea, as a vanishing of time indicates the removal of context and power, ignoring history as a socially constructed political device. In positioning the artist as historian, this relationship is even further complicated by a tension between artistic autonomy and the need for reflexivity.

Over the course of a year, Clark began working at Old Town as a volunteer, documenting and performing at the site. She discovered the park on a bus route from

school, which travels along the I-5 interstate and now divides the park from current-day downtown San Diego. As an artist who has intentionally involved herself in the activities of the park, I asked Clark about her role and relationship to the idea of interpretation. In taking on Old Town as a site for artwork, does Clark in turn take on a role as interpretive guide? In response, Clark says she doesn't consider herself necessarily as a park interpreter but rather an observer, keeping a removed relationship from the park in order to fully participate with its environment and people. She mentions the way her friend Kim Duclou, a park ranger, describes the role of the interpreter as more of a "generalist in a world that is more and more fixated upon the importance of specialization".

Clark says her interest in sites like Old Town have roots in a childhood resonance with a communitarian approach to living and working. She is drawn to these sites almost as if they were from a past life, incorporating research-based and ethnographic practices that explore a complex relationship of "regional identity, tourism, and how the effects of globalization play out in public parks and heritage sites" (Clark, 2012, pg. 6). This analysis initially involved research of the park's history, regular visits and working alongside some of the park's programs and people.

As an official volunteer for Old Town, Clark wore period clothing and helped staff programs with youth and publics. Some of the first artworks created for the project were a collection of marionettes hand-crafted to represent the characters and historical figures of Old Town, ranging from current park interpreters to an anonymous Franciscan Friar circa 1770, and Don Quixote the resident park donkey. It's notable that Clark

produced two marionette versions of herself as well, one as a tourist, student and artist, and the other as a volunteer and anonymous Western woman.

These marionettes were used during various interpretive programs, where Clark produced videos showcasing a group of youth and publics interacting with the marionettes. They were also used in other activities like a California Dancing Lesson session at the McCoy House Museum, showing Clark in full costume dancing with visitors. She also began an ongoing performance and video documentary of the park, donning a large ghost costume in which her head is extended another foot and half using a padded foam extension covered by a white sheet. She wanders the park and stares at visitors, continuing to walk aimlessly.

**Figure 26. Old Town Marionettes and Video Still - 2011**



While Clark initially wanted to give “radical history” tours of the park, she says she chose to develop a deeper understanding of the site by observing and instigating small interventions. Clarks says she witnessed a number of glaring errors and omissions during tours with schools groups (mostly fourth graders). Interpreters would gloss over certain histories related to colonial occupation and border politics despite being only 14

miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. She describes her observation of the park as “acting as a ghost”, acknowledging that “this is not a powerful position to be – ghosts have no agency, they maintain the status quo, and wail away about events in the past” (Clark, 2012).

At the point my interview, Clark had worked with the site for nearly a year and says the project is still ongoing. She used her experience to create a series of works for a small exhibition at UCSD in December of 2012. The show included an array of artifacts collected from the project including maps, clothing, photographs, brochures and marionettes. Video documentation of California folk dances are spliced with the video of her wearing the ghost costume, while walking around the park and on public transit. A performative talk about Old Town was given for the show’s opening in which Clark wore a costume from the park, and recreated some of the dialogue and conversation observed.

**Figure 27. Old Town Reading Performed at UCSD - 2012**



In reflecting on the project today, Clark notes an attraction to forms of performative role-play, and the reiteration of history:

...I’m interested in thinking about how America positions itself...to re-iterate a past, a violent past...it seemed there might be some nooks and crannies to hide

out in and find a liminal space that its acting out in a public park, seemed really interesting to me...Cause it requires grown adults and teenagers and children to suspend some kind of pragmatic relationship with time and space...

The issue of tourism Clark says marginalizes the capacity for the park to engage visitors critically. She explains this creates an exploitative relationship with visitors and the site's history that often remove opportunities for critical reflection. Here the convivial language and gift shop offerings mask a deeply political and uncomfortable colonial past of war and strife. Clark uses the metaphor of a jewelry box to describe this tenuous relationship, characterizing the site as one of many perfect jewels for us to admire that become separated from our everyday experience. She also expresses some hesitation and doubt in the way she's positioned herself in relationship to the park, noting:

I got too embroiled in the space, and I think I got bewitched and I probably spent too much time trying to learn about it and trying to document it instead of just being like ok, I have enough information. Like the schoolmarm in me took over and so the sensualist took the back seat. But the times that were most successful so far, have been when sensualism was brought back into the space.

In working with Old Town as a material, Clark becomes complicit in the neocolonial pedagogies circulated by the site, yet attempts to offer a kind of institutional critique. This is bound up with a process of interpretation, which Simon Sheikh (2010) explains, "inscribes both subjects and objects in specific relations of power and knowledge..." (pg. 64). Here, the interpretive guide engages in a process of representation, but also the production of subjectivities that circulate particular histories. Sheikh notes this is a political act of persuasion, "a power which aims at a rhetorical effect through its representation of otherness..." (pg. 65).



While Clark attempts to absolve herself of this role, the project in many ways falls short of its potential to critique and confront a powerful tool of oppression. This is complicated as Clark takes on multiple roles within the ongoing performance of Old Town itself, as a volunteer, university student and artist, implicating herself in the liminal ritual of enacting a historical past. Pedagogically, there is an opportunity to subvert the reenactment of Old Town through forms of critical pedagogy. While she struggles to accomplish this outright, she does confront the image and history of Old Town through writing and performance work. As Clark admits, the project is ongoing, yet it is still unclear how the viewer should participate and what Clark is specifically critiquing about the site.

CK: Look at this mushroom, I think its called white cheese...it's a polypore. So crazy how it spreads almost like a skin.

KC: It does, on the underbelly. There are mosquitos here just to warn you.

CK: Do you think this is a birch? Look at the size of this moss.

KC: Rainforest!

CK: Ya, epiphytes!

### **Journal Entry: The Kelp Forest Below**

We've been walking for nearly an hour now, and reach an ocean cliff overlooking the Puget Sound. Kate points out the staggering kelp forest below as a school of dolphins leaps from the ocean. All I need is a rainbow and then I can die a happy man, I think. After a moment of quiet I ask Kate to spin the mycowheel again. It falls on "self" and I ask Kate to reflect deeply on the *Native Stars* project and her teaching art practice. She

talks a great deal about the role of anthropology and the idea of ethnography being central to this work. I ask her to expand on issues of class and race, and then as we continue to ascend through the forest, Clark reveals that one of her students in the final week of the project was killed.

I can tell this is something that affected her deeply as we pause and rest by the trail. As we reach the next overlook, Kate tells me to close my eyes as she leads me up the trail. When I open my eyes, the views are sweeping and transformative. I feel like I'm seeing the world for the first time. Kate and I take a break here from the interview, exchanging personal stories and thoughts. As the afternoon grows long I ask Kate to spin the mycowheel for one last adventure...

### **Native Stars**

In January of 2012, Clark began working on a collaborative project with the Hirshhorn Museum's ArtLab in Washington D.C called *Native Stars*. The ArtLab opened in 2011, offering teenage youth a social space after school to experiment with digital media, music and photography. The ArtLab is located in an underground enclosure below the museum that looks out onto the Hirshhorn's sculpture garden. Youth can come and go as they please, while staff provide a series of programs and equipment that includes a music-recording studio, photo shoot space, video game units and laptop computers.

The *Native Stars* project was imagined by Clark and ArtLab mentor Jon Williams as an ethnographic sound experiment exploring the South East D.C. neighborhood of Anacostia, the same neighborhood Peterson was working in. To initiate the project, Clark and Williams invite artists from the ArtLab Noise Factory, a collective of youth who

aspire to be musicians, DJs and rappers, to help with the project. The group was asked to collect field recordings, conduct interviews and make music about their experience of living in and around Anacostia. Over the course of several weeks, students were given field-recording equipment to interview themselves and family members, make music and document their neighborhood. Clark and Williams also facilitated a series of workshops, walking tours, and conversations with the group, which averaged about 8-10 people.

Over the course of several weeks, the group collected sounds of the metro subway, conversations with people in the neighborhood, recordings from school, and produced original music at the ArtLab. An editorial process led by Clark and Williams allowed students to have input in editing various segments. The final audio work is about 30 minutes in duration, and is a collage of sounds, voices and hip-hop music reflecting the experience of South and North East Washington D.C.

In the opening few minutes, a kaleidoscope of voices and the sounds of the metro dissolve into Clark's voice, discussing some of the history of Anacostia and the Native American tribes that once lived here. She asks students: "What does Anacostia mean?", and discusses the use of agriculture and slavery in the area, as well as the lineage of Frederick Douglas and the working class history of the neighborhood. The sounds from the subway drown out the conversation and diffuse into a participant walking in the neighborhood describing what he sees. He eventually begins to tell a story about Frederick Douglas' invention of the term the "north star" from which the project takes its title.

The next segment layers the personal stories of the Noise Factory crew including Navorro “Moochie” Brown, Troy “Chill” Gray, Marquis “Mars” Gray, Stephanie Metts, Stephon “DJ KS” Moses, Renee Stinson, Joe “Hitman” Walker, and Andre “Jus Dre” Williams. A conversation with Stephanie’s grandfather follows, sharing his personal recollection of Anacostia in the 1970s. The two converse back and forth as he reveals what a different place Anacostia once was. A sound collage featuring hip-hop style beats and rhythm compliment two more stories from ArtLab participants exploring the struggle to find work, going to school and staying safe in the neighborhood while ambient sounds of the street and the city end the segment. (Final audio work is available at <https://soundcloud.com/kc-rose/native-stars>)

**Figure 28. Native Stars Production Team - January 2012**



Facilitating the *Native Stars* project was a challenge for Clark in many ways, a confrontation of her own white privilege and unmasking some of the deeply entrenched

issues of race and class in the nation's capital. Clark says in projects like this she is interested in creating opportunities for students to confront their historical pasts, facilitating a "collision of some kind between sites or ideas...finding time and space to identify a thread that you want to keep pulling...". Clark explains this requires a journey outside the classroom to confront the "safety of that landscape".

In conceptualizing the project, Clark admits she was not interested in telling participants what their home was like in the past, but rather letting the project inform what the group of youth were already doing, making music about their own communities and experiences. Clark describes this as an experiment in ethnography, referencing Guillermo Gómez-Peña's (2004) idea of "reverse anthropology":

...it was like reversing the relationship of the anthropologist onto yourself or whatever places that you're in....then it becomes foreign to you, so when you go back home you can think about it at as an expedition...that allows you to see things like injustice more clearly too, or violence or racial tensions. So as the week progressed the students had more agency in going on there own and coming back and being like ok this recording was interesting.

Gómez-Peña describes this approach to anthropology within the context of his own performance work, which often seeks to subvert existing power relations and question authorial structures. Gómez-Peña (2004) uses the term "bordering" to characterize this strategy of taking on and sampling multiple identities, using the body to make the "normal" seem exotic, and thus questioning a status quo and our desire for it.

While this may be a useful tool for critical performance art, we must be careful in attempting to translate these tactics into pedagogical tools for youth. On the steps of Douglas' home for instance, Clark recalls a participant named Joe asking: "so you're

white, right...how do you feel about your people owning slaves?’. Clark says in response she tried to commiserate with him, explaining that her family was historically poor and once looked down on because of their Irish descent. Clark says she tried to address the question as best she could, explaining:

...its a story that I don’t necessarily relate to. I know its there, but its not necessarily my inheritance either...of course slavery is still apart of our world and it isn’t that awkward for Joe to ask me that question, because its just a few generations back. But I feel really guilty about that, and to leave the conversation like that is not very interesting or productive. Because it’s like oh you feel guilty...or like nothing new comes from that.

In her response, Clark is hesitant to admit her own white privilege and instead attempts to shift blame and rationalize the situation.

Allan Johnson (2005) points out, talking openly about privilege isn’t easy, but ignoring it places us in a kind of illusory state of unreality. Privilege is not necessarily something we derive from who we are or what we’ve done, it’s a socially constructed arrangement that we often do not have any control over. The paradoxical nature of privilege is that we usually do not realize we are participating in systems of privilege, prompting us to engage in denial and rationalization. While Clark explains she was able to talk further about this with Joe, she distances herself from the issue by not opening a space to deconstruct and talk critically about race and power when the issue was initially brought up.

As the project progressed, Clarks says participants continued to mention issues of race and violence despite a desire to avoid a stereotyping of the neighborhood and youth involved. Clark explains:

...violence keeps getting brought up, and race keeps getting brought up and I'm like gosh, ya know I don't want this to be the primary part of the project...but that was a refrain that kept returning and then Moochi was killed...

Toward the end of the collaboration, Navorro "Moochi" Brown was fatally shot on the streets of Anacostia after leaving the ArtLab on January 10, 2012. In a controversial move, the Smithsonian hosted a memorial service after the funeral for Brown and friends at the Hirshhorn Museum. Kate says tensions flared, as an open mic setup allowed friends and family to remember Brown in their own words. The final *Native Stars* sound recording became a tribute to Brown offering an opportunity for his music and story to be heard and not silenced by his untimely death. Clark says she was shocked and disheartened by the turn of events, initiating a reflexive process that made her realize the reality of the situation for the youth she was working with, and also the limits of art making to address or make visible these circumstances. As a tribute to Brown, the final media work is powerful in many ways, providing a glimpse into a life of adversity and yet immense hope and talent.

According to a number of media scholars, youth-led projects like *Native Stars* seek to "democratise media production...to produce (rather than consume) mediatized stories about their own lives" (Alrutz, 2013, pg. 46). The act of media-making becomes an intentional and political act of cultural production, inviting participants to "(re)vision and construct, complex notions of who they are in the world" (Alrutz, 2013, pg. 48). These reconstructions draw from localized and distributed funds of knowledge between peer groups, family, digital communities and local neighborhoods.

Birrmoje et al. (2004) characterize this as a “third space” that merge knowledge culled from the home, neighborhood and community with the dominant discourses found in institutions like school, work and church. The notion of a third space invokes ideas of hybridity theory, noting the ways in which funds of knowledge can strengthen or diminish our set of meaning-making practices and identity formation. Things like school texts and popular media can act as colonizers, privileging and prioritizing certain discourses and literacies over others. A third space can act as a bridge or “navigational space”, a way to include diverse perspectives that deviate from a status quo. Digital storytelling and experiments in new media offer ways to provoke and agitate the creation of these third spaces as youth negotiate power and meaning on their own terms.

While some digital storytelling projects aim toward processes that critically examine systems of power, these projects can also reify identity-based assumptions and stereotypes as well. Megan Alrutz (2013) describes how this occurred in an applied theater program she facilitated with a group of youth in Austin, TX. She mentions scholars like Dani Snyder-Young (2011) who argue: “sometimes our efforts to empower youth...may in fact work to reinforce more dominant positions than it challenges” (pg. 42). This emphasizes the need for educators and artists to carefully negotiate and understand how privilege and power affect this process. This allows us to understand issues of identity and difference can never be fully unpacked in a neatly arranged month-long youth media project. Rather, the teaching artist and community must work together to open spaces of possibility, a third space for dialogue and conversation, using art as one of many devices to reflect. The responsibility of facilitators in this respect is not just to



guide the content or set of experiences, but also create the conditions for youth to confront issues of power and representation on their own terms.

### **Discussion**

Clark's work explores a number of issues, from historical re-enactment to border politics and digital storytelling. While many of her projects are socially engaged or use public space, she often relies on fine art practices like sculpture and drawing to create artifacts to represent these experiences. In her work at Old Town, the site itself has such a rich and complex history to draw from, yet her performative work and experience as a volunteer appears to romanticize the site, echoing Foster (2004) and Fusco's (1994) concern of "ethnographic self-fashioning". Clark instead relies on mediating objects like marionettes, rubbings and signs to communicate and critique the park's neo-colonial pedagogy. As viewers, we are left wondering what it would mean for her to take on a more intervening role, and to involve her own positionality in this context.

Clark's practice is perhaps purposefully open-ended, drawing from a Deleuzian (1987) and rhizomatic approach to both learning and public engagement that is intentionally ambiguous. This is communicated in performance and video works of Clark taking on a role as a ghost, asking the viewer to inhabit an otherworldly and perhaps uncertain space. However, Clark often relies on the traditional medium of an exhibition to communicate this, showcasing maps, artifacts, clothing and objects collected from the park that continues to exoticize the site. Here Clark is not so much re-enacting a history or taking on the role of historian as Blackson (2007) describes, but perhaps acting as a witness to the strange cultural performance of Old Town itself.

In the *Native Stars* project, Clark and Williams seek to engage youth in a conversation about Anacostia through audio and sound production. There is a gesturing toward Ellsworth's (2005) concept of the learning self here, imagining the project as a platform to cultivate knowledge through lived experience and site-specific exchange with. However, this is only partially achieved, due to the time constraints and formal structuring of the project, which includes a set of assumptions about the youth involved. As Clark pushes past these assumptions, she is able to realize what Birrmoje et al. (2004) call a "third space" to celebrate the knowledge of peers, participant's family and community. The final audio work communicates this through personal reflections and music created by youth, which form a rhizomatic layering of stories, histories and sounds. Finally, Clark and William's privilege as outsiders and artists is unfortunately never reconciled completely, impacting Clark's relationship to the project and participants involved. The death of Moochi in particular, is a solemn reminder of the tenuous conditions of Southeast D.C. and the complications of representing complex sociopolitical issues, for which art will never be sufficient.

**Table 8. Mushroom Findings - Sharpe Park, Anacortes, WA**

<b>Mushroom</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Rosy Conk</b> (Fomitopsis cajanderi)	A widely distributed bracket fungus, commonly known as the rosy conk due to its rose-colored pore surface, it causes a disease called a brown pocket rot in various tree species.
<b>Conifer Based Polypore</b> (Heterobasidion annosum)	Has a hard, brownish, stalkless cap with white to yellowish pores. The cap generally measures 1-10" wide and is flat with a wavy margin, often protruding from a spreading, crustlike mass that is off-white, gray-brown, or dark brown.
<b>White Crust Fungus</b>	This is a white or cream encrusting growth with a wrinkled

(Byssomerulius corium)	surface and interlinked parchment.
<b>Indigo Milky</b> (Lactarius indigo)	Lactarius means, “milk mushroom” and can be a delicious edible mushroom, but many are poisonous. Very peppery in its flavor, almost to the point of being bitter. Grows on the ground in both deciduous and coniferous forests, where it forms mycorrhizal associations with a broad range of trees.
<b>False Turkey Tail</b> (Stereum ostrea)	The False Turkey Tail mimics Trametes versicolor. It has a colorful, somewhat fuzzy cap that displays zones of brown, red, orange, and green colors.
<b>Red-belted polypore</b> (Fomitopsis pinicola)	The Red-Belted Conk while often up to a foot wide can sometimes reach almost 3 times that size on the trunks of the largest old growth trees. It appears shelf-like on the sides of old or dying trees, and forms a cubical brown rot on both the sapwood and heartwood.

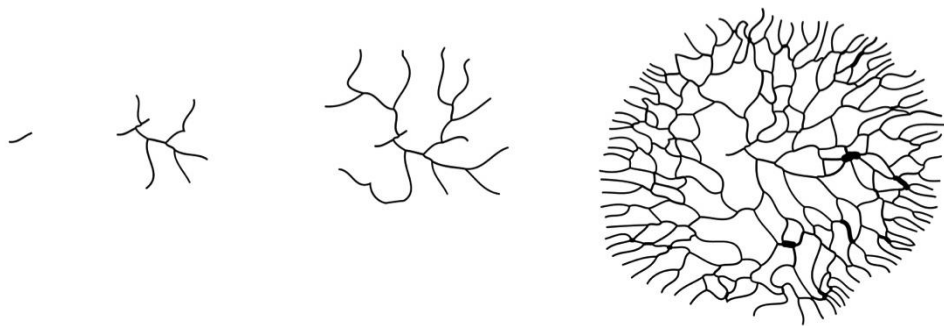
## CHAPTER VI

### MUSHROOM

What could be gained if we considered the problem of collaboration from the vantage point of mushrooms—or even wider collaborative commitments? (Choy et al, 2009, pg. 382)

When the largest and oldest living organism known surfaces, it manifests as a delicate mushroom no bigger than the palm of a hand. Just below the surface, the mushroom is connected to a vast network of threadlike roots that extend nearly 2,400 acres throughout the Malheur National Forest in Eastern Oregon. Although the fruiting body of the fungus appears as a tiny mushroom, the entire network is actually a singular entity, an unseen web that is slowly regenerating the forest by decomposing it over time.

**Figure 29. Rhizomatic Growth**



Ontologically, fungi operate at a level of complexity that scientists still do not understand. Mycologist Paul Stamets (2005) characterizes mushrooms as the “neurological network of nature”, likening mycelium to the archetypical pattern of a

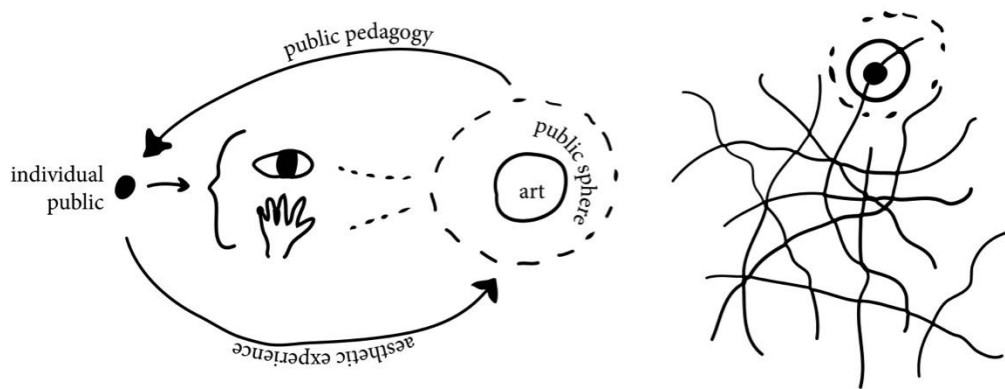
spiral galaxy and string theory (pg. 7). He explains the architecture of fungi is all around us, in the formation of hurricanes and weather events, the invisible network of the Internet, the cellular makeup of DNA and the living tissue of the human body. They are used as insulation for buildings, they can eat oil spills, protect us against bioterrorism, and have been proven to cure some cancers.

In the context of this study, fungi provide a conceptual guide and material to consider socially engaged art and public pedagogy as a networked and relational system. Just as a mycelia network traverses the forest floor, socially engaged artworks unfold relationally in a public space offering embodied and aesthetic experiences and opportunities to participate in practices and actions that may be foreign to one's everyday experience. These gestures draw from social, political and cultural networks and popular cultures through which a network of memories, associations and perhaps new understandings of self and other begin to emerge. This is an inherently pedagogical activity through which artists draw from local and global funds of knowledge and subjectivities. Fungi provide a space to consider these approaches as interconnected, woven within a socio-political matrix of art and education.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea of "rhizomatic becoming" offers a means to understand this theoretically. They describe our interaction and experience in the world as a complex assemblage of non-linear passages that collapse and fold onto each other, never settling, never making permanence. This is a relational and creative process that mimics the development of a mycelia network in many ways. As new nodes are created, others close and form in an ongoing experiment that opens new possibilities. Ellsworth

(2005) describes this pedagogically as a “nonlinguistic event”, where the mind, body, heart and soul coalesce in our experience and making sense of the world. As we engage and participate with each other, learning unfolds as a radically relational activity, a network of experiences and unconscious awakenings.

**Figure 30. Public Pedagogy and Art as a Rhizomatic Network**



Our lived experience is what gives pedagogy its form and material, “a force ontologically prior to curriculum”, where something new emerges (pg. 12). With the onslaught of global capitalism, the materiality of pedagogy is often obscured and difficult to locate. Ellsworth (2005) argues we need “non-examples” that occur outside of education to “act as catalysts not just to visualize a better world, but to arouse in the public a desire for one” (pg. 9). She suggests this can be found in the realm of art, design, architecture and social action. Yet, our capacity to “read” and fully comprehend these examples require a post-formal and critical approach that imagines creativity, art and knowledge as uncertain and interconnected.

Throughout this study the work of Woolard, Peterson, Clark and Thornton present a number of salient “non-examples”, illustrating a contemporary desire to experiment with the form of art and pedagogy, where the “learning self” can emerge. The mushroom provides a platform to access this rhizomatically, breaking down territories between culture and education that limit the circulation of critical public pedagogies and meaningful aesthetic experience. The aim is not to presume the mushroom as a universal model, but rather to use the uncertain nature of fungi to relocate learning and culture as something open-ended, interconnected and ambiguous.

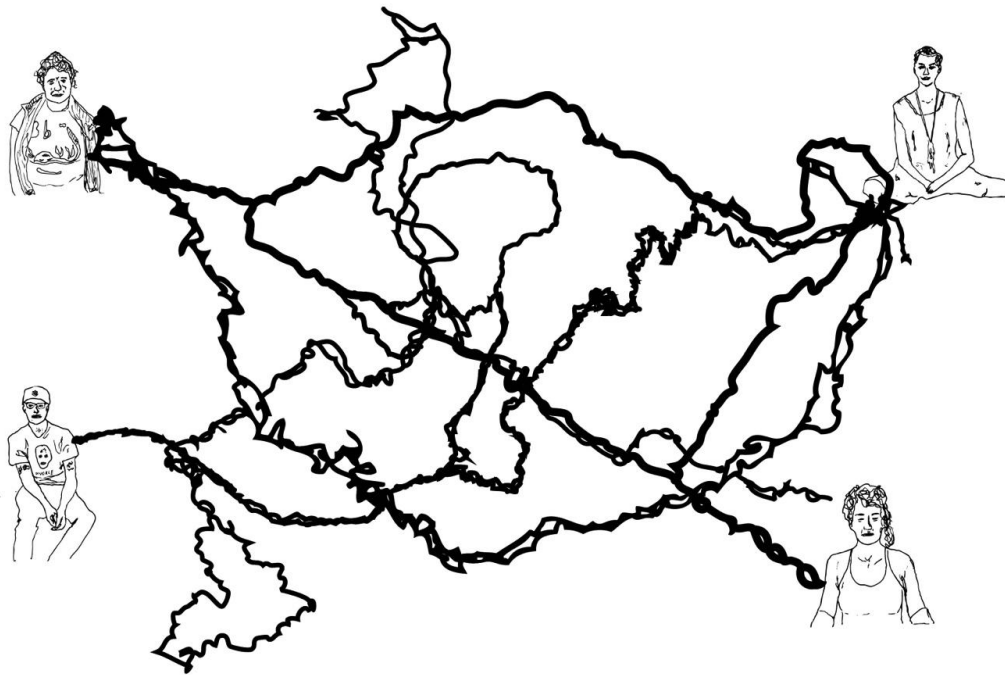
Nearly 50 years ago, John Cage found solace in mushrooms as a kind of spiritual guide and emblem for chance composition. I believe he was drawn to fungi because it offered an opportunity to continually reflect and imagine a creative response to the looming ecological and moral crises of the world. As Cage (1963) once said, we often “have the impression that we’re learning nothing, but as the years pass we recognize more and more mushrooms...” (pg. 84). While he was indeed interested in the visceral nature of mushrooms, Cage also understood fungi metaphorically as tool to develop our “powers of audition” and awareness in the world.

Like Cage, we are all searching for mushrooms in one way or another. As we enter deep into the forest of our lives, fungi invite us to walk slowly and listen intently to everything around and within. The closer we peer into each mushroom, we inevitably find new and uncertain understandings that set us on different paths, and present even more questions to the answers we seek daily. Cage asks us to embrace the ambiguity of

this journey and find strength in the networked mystery of those things we cannot see, and those we wish to appear.

In this concluding chapter, the stories and experience of Clark, Woolard, Peterson and Thornton will provide a space to critically consider some of the challenges and opportunities of public pedagogy and socially engaged art practice. What are the ethical and political implications of making work under the banner of social practice? Are these practices inherently pedagogical in nature, and what responsibility do artists have in locating their own desires and identities within their work?

**Figure 31. A Collective Mycography**





The first section will focus on the complexity of artist/teacher identity, and how this is shaped by art discourse, education, and a capacity for critical reflection. Drawing from the work of Paul Ricoeur (1992), Carol Becker (1993), Catriona Mackenzie (2000) and others, I will consider how artists and teaching artists construct a notion of self and how this impacts their work with youth and publics. The second section will investigate the institutionalization of social practice and how this shapes each artist's practice and authorial power in community engagement.

Finally, the discourse of public pedagogy will be used to further theorize and understand each artist's relationship to the public sphere and the kinds of learning that extend from these encounters. Using Giroux's (2000) notion of "critical public pedagogy", I will also explore public pedagogy's ethical imperative, which Gaztambide-Fernandez and Matute (2014) argue requires an integrated moral and epistemological stance to cultivate "communities of solidarity, premised on communicative openness..." (pg. 62). In the conclusion, fungi will provide an opportunity to reflect on these interconnected issues, offering a networked and relational understanding of public pedagogy in the context of social and participatory art practice.

### **Escaping Self**

#### **Negotiating Multiple Identities and Roles**

Artists re-present the culture from which their identity has been constructed – their race, class, ethnicity, their sexuality, the complex combination of forces, which have shaped the way in which they see the world. (Becker, 1993, pg. 48)

In exploring the work of Stuart Hall, Silvia C. Bettez (2010) explains identity is “bound by discourses and practices, both our own and those of other people” (pg. 142). It is a subjective and continually changing relationship with self and other, emerging as something fragmented and oppositional, and yet fluid and relational. In considering the experience and work of Woolard, Peterson, Clark and Thornton, their identities are influenced and shaped by a number of competing forces including the discourse of art and art schooling, geography and cultural upbringing among others. Their work as socially engaged artists complicate these identities further as they negotiate multiple roles as organizer, artist, and pedagogue among others.

Susan Goetz Zwirn (2005) points out schools often do not prepare artists to navigate the shifting role of artist/teacher. She explains the focus is primarily on fine art technique and skill mastery and not necessarily equipping artists to become community stewards or educators. Although Thornton, Clark, Woolard and Peterson all have some experience as a teacher or educator, but they did not receive any formal training in education. While this may not be necessary or even inhibit creativity in the classroom, there is an assumption being made here about who can be an art teacher and how artists are expected to navigate these roles.

Zwirn also explains, some artists tend to regard art education as something less-than or “other” because it may not allow them to continue their practice or exhibit their work in the same way (Brown and Korzenik, 1993; LaChapelle, 1991). There is also a “persistent stereotype of the teacher as someone who teaches because he or she is ‘not good enough’ to be a full-time artist” (Zwirn, 2006, pg. 167). For artists who become art

teachers, there is an expectation to fit within a bounded curriculum and conception of schooling at the expense of creative experimentation. Alan Thornton (2005) explains the “incompatibilities between the artist’s agenda and the teacher’s responsibilities to pupils” is a frequent problem (pg. 71). To remedy this, Thornton makes an argument for an artist/teacher identity as mutually supportive and not antagonistic.

In conversations with Thornton for instance, the negotiation of artist/teacher identity was a recurring issue for members of the Teaching Artist Union. Thornton points out, many of these artists were unwilling to link their individual art practice to their work in schools or museums. Teaching was considered a temporary job, while their art practice a long-term career. This resistance to identify as a teaching artist is partly economic, but also stems from a subjective understanding of the art educator as something different and perhaps less important than a practicing contemporary artist.

Clark explains the difference between an art educator and a teaching artist is nuanced in this respect:

...if you’re a teaching artist, to me that connotes that you have some other things going on that don’t necessarily involve working with groups of people in the role of a teacher. If you’re an art educator, to me it reads that you have these proclivities of being like a creative practitioner but you’re focus is the educational piece as your practice. But I think it’s just a mixture of semantics and your own interests and however you want to work with them...

When pressed further to elaborate and asked if her art and teaching practice intersect, Clark explains they have different facets. She warns:

I have to be careful with that because what will happen is the art, the part that isn't individual voice of me will get flattened for the greater good of something else, when I'm teaching.

Rather than recognize the synchronous potentials between the identity of artist and teacher, participants typically see these roles as separate or territorialized by institutions, which influence their own subjective understanding of “artist” and “teacher”.

What's more, while Clark and Thornton were fine with using the term “teaching artist” to describe their involvement with schools or non-profits, Peterson and Woolard seemed more hesitant in this respect. Peterson was more comfortable with the term “instructor” or “documentarian”, whereas Woolard preferred the term “facilitator” or “organizer” to describe her involvement in projects like *OurGoods* or *Trade School*. The table below provides an overview of some of the shifting identities shared and used by each participant. The “assumed identity” refers to an identity that institutions, colleagues or strangers will use on behalf of a participant. The economic identity refers to roles taken on to supplement income, while the “community identity” refers to different roles used when each artist collaborates on projects with a public, and the “desired identity” linked to the specific role artists claim is their preference. In nearly every case, the desired identity rarely matches the assumed, community or economic identities taken on by each artist.

**Table 9. Shifting Identities**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Peterson</b>	<b>Thornton</b>	<b>Woolard</b>	<b>Clark</b>
<b>Assumed Identity</b>	Artist	Teaching Artist	Artist	Artist
<b>Economic</b>	Documentarian,	Curriculum	Designer,	Art educator,

<b>Identity</b>	art handler, studio assistant, theater attendant, teaching artist	designer, education administrator, teaching artist, art educator	lecturer, adjunct professor, consultant	teaching assistant, fine artist
<b>Community Identity</b>	Radio DJ, organizer, curator and educator	Political organizer, healer, community organizer, chef	Network organizer, political activist, teacher, administrator	Educator, tour guide, interpreter, organizer
<b>Desired Identity</b>	Film maker, sound producer	Collective, artist, philosopher	Facilitator, organizer	Artist, teaching artist
<b>Preferred Gender/Sexual Identity</b>	Male; Straight	Female; Straight	Female; Queer	Female; Straight

It's important to consider the role funding plays in these designations, which in many cases determines each artist's relationship to the field of education. Institutions like museums, foundations and schools control a great deal of this funding, and thus dictate the kinds of roles and identities artists are expected to take on. This shapes a set of assumptions made concerning the role of the artist or educator, the scope and form of an art education project, and the expectations for assessment. Often an artist or educator is hired to address an agenda outlined by a granting body that forces the artist to compromise their vision and thus affects how they perceive their role and identity within these contexts.

Gender is also an integral challenge to locating a coherent artist/teacher identity. In a qualitative study of male and female teachers who work in the arts, Zwirn (2006) found that most men identify as an artist early on and that this identification was understood as natural and innate. Women responded differently expressing a more

complex understanding of their identities and roles as shifting and in flux. Using some of the stories collected from the study, Zwirn argues that woman face a greater number of obstacles linked to an overtly male power structure that exists within the artworld and elsewhere. Artistic identity for women is thus susceptible to a number of competing influences. In similar studies by Brooks and Daniluk (1998), woman participants expressed a “sense of being obstructed in their pursuit of an art career ranging from clear sex discrimination to disapproving comments” (p. 251).

A number of scholars have explored the ways in which female subjectivity is influenced and distorted by prevailing political and cultural discourse. Feminist scholars argue this is a historical and ideological issue that persists today in the continued violence and oppression of women, and intimately connected to the way language is developed and used. In the 1980’s Cheris Kramarae (1981) and Shirley Ardener (1978) argued the perspectives of women are “muted” because feminine viewpoints are structurally separated from the dominant communication system of a society. Feminist standpoint theory and other concepts continue to develop these ideas, explaining social location, race and class also “shapes the social, symbolic, and material conditions” of marginalized groups such as women (Wood, 2005, pg. 61). As Luce Irigaray (1985) famously argues, “any theory of the ‘subject’ has always been appropriated by the ‘masculine’”, making this issue an ongoing struggle that continues to plague the fields of both art and education (pg. 133).

In this study, three of the participants identify as woman, two are straight (Clark and Thornton), while Woolard identifies as queer, and Peterson as straight. Peterson in

particular described a desire to be an artist from an early age, expressing an affinity to artists like Jackson Pollock and Rodin for their ability to capture the “epicness of the human spirit”. Woolard in contrast struggled with her own gender/sexual identity through adolescence. This confrontation of gender/sexual norms played a crucial role in her interest in art, explaining how it provided a safe space to embrace alternative culture. In contrast, Clark and Thornton seem less interested in the role of gender and sexual identity in their work. This is particularly salient in Thornton’s use of the term “Feminist” in *Feminist Economics Department*, which only partially acknowledges a history of feminist performance art or body representation and performativity.

As Woolard, Thornton, Clark and Peterson create and work alongside publics, the ability to shift roles and take on multiple identities throughout the course of a project is integral to the project’s “success”. In *Trade School* for instance, Woolard negotiates an identity as artist in helping to conceive the project, but later takes on a role as organizer and administrator in launching the project in New York. Woolard also taught several classes during *Trade School’s* first session, taking on a role as educator while continuing to organize the project. Similarly, Thornton regularly uses lectures and public performances to discuss the issue of debt, serving as both an educator and an artist simultaneously. Clark’s role as a volunteer and interpreter at Old Town was also complicated by her multiple identities as artist and graduate student, while Peterson interprets his role as a documentarian, yet also serves as pedagogue in the stories and public pedagogies circulated through his projects.

While in some cases each artist's previous experience as an educator contributes to the quality of interpretation and participation of each work, the priority is not always a pedagogical one. Rather what tends to unfold is a shifting negotiation of multiple identities, where the duality of artist/teacher becomes a point of entry and departure for each work. Theoretically, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of a rhizomatic or decentered identity provides a way to frame and understand the tensions and opportunities for the artist/teacher.

Deleuze and Guattari understand identity itself is always in a state of flux as social forces and individual pressures shape our subjectivity and understanding of self. They reject the idea of a rational subject and instead embrace the idea of decentered subjects that are free to change and shift over time. Best and Kellner (1991) explain,

...they reject the modernist notion of a unified, rational, and expressive subject and attempt to make possible the emergence of new types of decentered subjects, liberated from what they see to be the terror of fixed and unified identities, and free to become dispersed and multiple, reconstituted as new types of subjectivities and bodies. (para. 7)

Here identity and belonging are a continuous kind of "becoming", which change and morph according to place, situation and context. Identity in this sense is not static, but rather emerges like a mycelia network and continues to grow and expand indeterminately.

In understanding artists/teacher identity as a continuum, curators, principals and institutional partners alike can foster the synchronicities between these roles, rather than assume particular outcomes based on either identity. This is an important consideration,



especially amongst artists and cultural producers who engage in work that is public or pedagogical in some way. In making these connections, the artist as pedagogue can inform and nourish the knowledge produced through their projects and the ways this is circulated and received.

### **Dominant Narratives of Art and the Art Academy**

Artists have been taught how to make art, but not to ask why...If the political responsibility of a cultural reflexivity (why) is not taught along with a knowledge of the history of how artists have made meaning, then we are doomed to be oppressed by our traditions rather than informed by them. (Kosuth, 1969, pg. 15).

The discourse of contemporary art and the experience of art schooling also plays an important role in shaping the identities of each participant. Historically, the idea of artist is often associated with “genius, masterpiece, divine inspiration and predominantly white Western art that ends with impressionism” (Becker, 1993, pg. 52). A postmodern critique of art has attempted to challenge many of these conceptions, yet is often coopted by institutions and more recently a trend toward professionalization and entrepreneurship. The identity of artist is also ideologically linked to the concept of creative autonomy or freedom, often at the expense of acknowledging a responsibility to a particular audience. A surrender of autonomy would presumably compromise an artist’s agency, which is understood ontologically as the basis of art theory and discourse (Ranciere, 2004).

Becker (1993) further argues the public’s sense of art is often in conflict with an artist’s interpretation. She explains the public typically has an expectation that an artwork will be pleasurable and “catapult its viewers outside their mundane lives, provide therapeutic resolution...and that it will end in wonder” (pg. 47). When an art object or

experience does not clearly convey this, audiences can be frustrated and develop a negative association with art that is directed to the artist and curator. The language of art becomes an exclusive domain here that influences the readability of a visual work.

In the contemporary artworld in particular, there is an increased pressure to continually push the boundaries of cultural production. Museums are now in the business of creating mega-exhibitions, mass spectacles, and shock-laden works to rouse an audience and increase attendance. The imperative to make something new and exciting can invariably influence the narrative of what a successful and emerging artist should be, creating the conditions for Bojana Kunst's (2012) notion of "projective time" to unfold. This is connected in part to the highly lucrative luxury and art market that continues to position art as commodity to buy and sell.

In Woolard's experience, she explores a desire to reject the dominant narrative of the art market and exhibitionary complex. Yet she continues to participate within museum and cultural spaces because they afford her the privilege to appropriate these spaces for more socially just concerns. The *Exchange Café* at the MoMA and *Trade School* at the Whitney are salient examples. While each project continued to explore issues of barter and exchange, they were also a means to re-imagine and trouble the museum as a place for community building and resistance.

Art schooling also plays a pivotal role in shaping the identity of artists. Becker (1993) explains art students are often pressured to understand the objective of their work, but not necessarily the subject or intended audience. This results in artworks that reference obscure histories that a public may not understand, or the creation of issue-

based work that students use to “educate” an audience. While this may be well intentioned, it can also alienate and make assumptions about what the public can contribute to the work. Becker also points out students are given little historical sense of how art is connected to social movements and political systems that continue to shape American society. While she does not advocate for artists to merely “simplify their work”, Becker (1993) does believe young artists should learn to help the “viewer through the work's complexity” so it can be accessed by a more diverse audience (pg. 55). However, she cautions this is a tenuous negotiation that can either liberate the artist from the art world’s exclusive and “hermetic” culture, or reify a normative art discourse that is then reflected in their practice and work.

In conversations with Clark, Woolard, Thornton and Peterson, their experience of art school was described as frustrating and yet influential in their mastery of materials and art history. All four artists were granted a BA or BFA in art, and also expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the specialization of disciplines and rigidity of their programs. While many institutions are moving toward an expanded understanding of artistic practice, the focus on material-based transformations and technique is still privileged. Woolard explains many of her classes at Cooper Union discouraged teachers or students from collaborating, expressing a sense of disconnect and isolation that contributed to her interest in barter and exchange. Peterson similarly expressed his frustration with what he called the “siloing of departments” and lack of communication between disciplines at the University of Georgia, encouraging an interest in forms of interdisciplinary media work.

Similarly, Clark's transition from an open school with no grades to a state school with 150-person lecture halls is described as a challenge that she addresses through site-specific work off campus. Thornton in particular re-focused her entire practice around the issue of debt incurred through her MFA program, which is apart of a growing movement of social practice MFA programs now offered at Universities around the world. These programs offer courses in the theory of critical and social art practice, which Thornton describes as problematic and yet helpful in developing a theoretical and historical understanding of this work.

As artists engage with the art world and complete their schooling, these dominant narratives shape their identities and inform their approach to art practice and process. To understand how this operates theoretically, Paul Ricouer's (1992) "narrative view" of identity is helpful. Ricouer locates his understanding of personal identity around the stories or narratives we create and take on in our lives. These narratives draw from our past experience, our present circumstance and imagined future. The formation of identity according to Ricouer is located in a tension between sameness and selfhood, where sameness is linked to things that are stable and "real", and selfhood a space where subjectivity and difference emerge. These two elements comprise the narrative identity we use to tell our life story, which is rooted in our personal ideologies and actions. Ricouer argues a coherent or balanced form of narratization considers sameness and selfhood as connected and overlapping, using devices like the imagination to inform our experience of time and communicate this identity.

For the artists included in this study, the notion of narrative identity may provide a framework to examine the subjective nature of dominant narratives we use to inform our own story and those thrust upon us from institutions and peers. Our understanding of time is integral to the coherence of this narratization, Ricouer stressing an understanding of both historical contingency and future desire as something that mutually shapes our present actions. In recognizing their synchronous relationship, a space for criticality can emerge allowing artists to reconstruct a narrative that is balanced by a shifting and subjective relationship to their work, and an awareness of socio-political forces that shape this narrative.

### **Locational Identity and Reflective Equilibrium**

In this last section I want to focus on cultural upbringing and locational identity. All four participants identified as white, American, and have access to different forms of socio-cultural capital and privilege. In talking with Peterson, Woolard and Clark, their family and home life appears to have been a nurturing space that played a key role in their adoption of an artistic identity and their ability to pursue art as a career path. Woolard in particular was able to attend several private schools with an arts focus, whereas Peterson and Clark attended public or parochial schools in their respective communities. Clark's parents were both teachers and described growing up in Anacortes as a positive experience that nurtured her fascination with history and ecology. Thornton, although she preferred not to talk in depth about her upbringing, faced some challenges growing up linked to her mother's health and other family issues. These realities linger on today as she continues to face unique economic pressures.

All four participants grew up in different parts of the country, and these geographies inform their identity development and practice. Peterson in particular describes a tenuous relationship with the Southern U.S. and conservative politics that influenced his work abroad and around social issues. Similarly, the language and etiquette of privilege is evident in many of Woolard's accounts of growing up, which encouraged her work with Solidarity NYC and development of projects like *OurGoods*. In contrast, Clark grew up within a small island community in the Pacific Northwest that she describes as nurturing and Thornton's experience in the Midwest seems to have been positive, yet her decision to move to NYC after college signals some degree of restlessness.

Miwon Kwon (2004) in her book *One Place After Another* explores a number of struggles associated with the locational identities of contemporary artists. She explains there is currently a kind romanticism linked to the cultural practitioner on the go, describing a new breed of artists who regularly lecture around the country, launch projects internationally, and have home bases on different coasts. Kwon points out, this has engendered an "artist-subject...liberated from any enduring ties to local circumstances" (Kwon, 2000, pg. 33).

Kwon also mentions Lucy Lippard's (1997) exploration of locational identity in her book *The Lure of the Local*. Lippard provides case studies of artists who use research-based practices, place and community building in their work. She explains a number of scholars including Henri Lefebvre (1992) and Yu-Fu Tuan (2001) argue our sense of identity is intimately connected to place and the cultural histories they inhabit. However

the new demands of a globally aware citizen, as Kwon and Lippard point out, can often displace and influence this capacity. Kwon characterizes this as a kind of existential “homelessness”, resulting in a feeling of alienation that many artists attempt to absolve by moving to cultural hubs like Los Angeles or New York.

There is an escapism at work here. In leaving our home, we grow and expand our web of experiences in the world, yet our identities can dissolve into the anonymity of urban space. While cities are vital cultural hubs, they also present barriers to long-term investment in place and community. Woolard shares a number of accounts during her undergraduate work at Cooper Union that echo this tension:

When artists are so in debt and so individualized because they’ve been through the school system now, they’re not just expressing themselves in relationship to a historical moment, they’re actually schooled about their grade for their work, their debt. They’re very individualized and they may not even have a geographic context because they went to schools all over the place and they don’t feel place-based and they don’t even have a real community outside of institutions that frame them.

Her particular investment in NYC and work around issues of economic solidarity is perhaps a means to rectify this alienation. Clark also expresses a deep connection to place in her practice, yet there doesn’t appear to be a fully formed social or political critique of her own involvement in spaces like Old Town as of yet.

Thornton’s projects in contrast are often nomadic and ephemeral, in part due to their performative nature. She often uses a pop-up model, creating beauty salons, schools, lectures and workshops inside galleries, museums or storefronts. While many of these projects are ongoing, she seems to be uncomfortable with the idea of choosing one

particular site or place to grow a movement and community, a challenge also linked to funding. Peterson similarly creates temporary spaces for projects like *Radio Transmission Ark* in Washington, D.C. where it can be similarly difficult to sustain and build a community.

Catriona Mackenzie's (2000) notion of "reflective equilibrium" may offer a means to address some of these tensions. To frame MacKenzie's theory, Kim Atkins (2005) explores Seyla Benhabib's (1987) notion of a "generalized other" to describe a tendency to separate what we believe and do in the world from a political responsibility implicit in our actions. The abstraction of capitalism and the division of private/public space is a large contributor to this, shaping a masculine conception of self that is "narcissistic and disengaged from the most basic bond of dependence" (Atkins, 2005, pg. 279). Atkins explains this enables forms of oppression and disconnect to emerge, where Benhabib's "generalized other" is no longer considered a human subject.

To address this, Mackenzie argues for one's political and personal autonomy to be considered within a unified and valued "self-conception". She explores how imaginative thinking can empower and at times constrict the formation of one's identity and agency, which is mediated by available symbols, images and representations. Mackenzie believes that personal autonomy is dependent on a kind of "reflective equilibrium" that consists of "one's self-conception; one's point of view; and one's values, ideals, and commitments" (pg. 285). A reflective equilibrium is achieved through critical reflection and a post-formal integration of these elements. She suggests this can perhaps open a space of possibility to continually re-evaluate our positionality and imagine new languages,



practices and ways of being that attend to a limited worldview and the construction of a “generalized other”. This is not something she argues can be taught, but rather experienced through struggle and confrontation with “otherness” in our own practice and ideologies.

### **Ethical Accountability in Social Practice**

In creating socially engaged work, artists make a decision to not only involve people in a project, but also affect the public sphere and take on a political and cultural position through this work. This fundamentally changes the artist’s relationship with an audience and the ethical dimensions of their practice. The artist is now accountable to a particular group of people because they are involved directly in creating and interacting with the work. Kester (1995) warns the artist can easily use their authority to exploit this arrangement, assuming there is a community need to address without first consulting or collaborating directly with this community. The artist is absolved of any privilege or cultural identity, and begins to self-identify with this community by taking on their pain and suffering.

An artist may develop a specific service, create a “community” sculpture, host a forum, stage an intervention or relocate a pre-existing resource inside a cultural space. These tactics appropriate a socio-cultural issue and attempt to remedy or raise awareness without developing a long-term critical vision of how and why. Rather than feel empowered to critically engage an issue, the artist often leaves after the project unfinished and expects the community collaboration to continue without developing structures for resiliency or mutual benefit. In using their privilege and cultural capital to

access institutions or situated communities, social practitioners compromise the political potential of this work.

Positionality and reflexivity are integral factors as well. In taking on the task of working with people or a specific community, social practitioners must make visible an intention for a project and how it is framed ideologically. If an artist refuses to share or open this process, a power dynamic is created within a community that can easily be exploited and impacts how the project is received and circulated. As a social practitioner, artists have an ethical responsibility to clearly define their positions to ensure the criticality of this work. This allows an audience to enter into dialog with an artist and negotiate the terms of participation before a project unfolds.

Kester (2011), Bishop (2012), Ranciere (2005) and others warn if artists are unable to identify their ethical obligations with the communities they seek to work with, the artwork itself becomes a form of exploitation. Ranciere in particular stresses the need for artists to deeply consider art's relationship to social change and how we assume it is bound "to the promise of a better world" (Bishop, 2012, pg. 29). In assuming the capacity for art to restore some social bond, we ignore the political and ethical intentions of an artwork and its capacity to critically engage a particular context or site.

The pedagogical intention of these projects also asserts a kind of power over an audience or public that requires careful negotiation. Artists may presume education is needed to inform a particular work, while ignoring the funds of knowledge that may already exist within a group and thus disenfranchising a community with perhaps well-meaning intentions. As we will discuss further in this chapter, pedagogy assumes an

intention and desire to change the subjectivity of another and in so doing creates a power dynamic that can become inequitable. Woolard's Trade School project explores a number of these tensions, attempting to create a democratic space to share wisdom, yet initially ignores the complications of class and privilege in how that space is constructed and sustained.

Artist's involvement with institutions like schools, museums and cultural organizations complicates this further. Although social practitioners often reject and critique the institutions of art and education, they necessarily support and work within these spaces. The institution acts as a supporting structure and yet contextualizes their work even amidst resistance or critique. Sophia Kosmaoglou (2012) explains once artists begin to work alongside an institution they may not be able to "sustain an independent critical position without endangering their own precarious position within the institution" (pg. 186). She argues this alters how artists translate the material and symbolic dimensions of a work, and the types of value and meanings produced by a public. To address this, Kosmaoglou makes a case for independent forms of production and resistance that encourage "plural and inclusive spaces of social interaction" (pg. 190).

Finally, Becker (1993) suggests artists should develop some critical distance in the creation of an artwork to consider the ethical and socio-cultural dimensions it presents. She argues artists should ask the following questions to ensure an artwork can enter into "serious debate" in the larger discourse of art and education:

From what ideological position was it formed? For whom was it made? Whose interests does it represent? Whose does it serve? What underlying questions does it ask? What implicit power relations frame it? (pg. 48)

While the lures of the market and the institution of schooling make these questions difficult to ask, artists still have a responsibility to recognize their complicity in producing cultural symbols and how this influences the public sphere. Without recognition of this power, the critical dimension of a socially engaged work is compromised and runs the risk of enacting Kester's proscription of "aesthetic evangelism".

### **The Limits of Social Practice**

#### **Theorizing Social Practice**

While the "radical" art movements of the 1950s and 60s continue to inspire social change today, their original intention is often coopted in dangerous ways. As we explored in Chapter III, these movements were a response to political upheavals, war and economic inequity, prompting artists and activists to develop critical approaches to social organizing and cultural production. When this revolutionary moment came to a close, Claire Bishop (2004; 2012) explains a capacity for democratic resistance and change was appropriated by a neoliberal agenda of reform and social renewal.

In this wake, a new brand of corporate capitalism and globalization infiltrated the artworld in unforeseen ways. Many artists have responded in turn with institutional critiques and a reemerging interest in forms of participatory, site-specific and socially engaged art practice that reject the museum and gallery complex. Nicolas Bourriaud's (1998; 2007) concept of "relational aesthetics" attempts to describe this moment, theorizing a movement toward participation and interactivity in artworks from the 1990s onward.

While participation in art is nothing new, artworks being produced under the banner of “social practice”, especially in the 2000s, express a renewed interest in social engagement and change. Yet as Hal Foster (2004) points out, there is a difference today in the discursive relations of these works, raising questions about their intention and political autonomy. He writes:

Art collectives in the recent past, such as those formed around AIDS activism, were political projects; today simply getting together sometimes seems to be enough. (pg. 194)

To understand what is philosophically and theoretically different about social and participatory art in the 1960s versus today, we need to understand how these works operate politically. Jacques Ranciere (2004) for instance describes these practices within a lens of critical theory, explaining “critical art” aims to unseat “mechanisms of domination in order to turn the spectator into a conscious agent...” (pg. 88). This is always a tenuous and political negotiation that Ranciere explains runs the risk of either forcing awareness and relieving the viewer of agency, or placing “critical art” in the context of the everyday and making it difficult for us to distinguish and understand as a form of resistance.

We see this tension unfold in the performative actions of feminist art in the 1960s. Spaces like the Woman’s Building in San Francisco provided a forum to not only address the inequities of gender and sexual discrimination, but also the development of a entirely specific set of languages, modes of embodiment and critique of a masculine conception of art. These practices were not political merely in their rejection of a marginalized and

gendered form of representation, but in the experience and agency afforded to the audience through direct participation. Similarly, artworks like Warhol's painting of a soup can or John Cage's compositions, while singular moments of provocation, are not necessarily a political gesture. Rather the political dimension is located in the discursive and relational encounters produced through the work itself, and its ability to critique dominant signs and symbols circulated in the public sphere.

Although artists today continue to create politically charged works, the ability to critique and resist corporate and commercial media has been severely compromised. This is due in part to what Brian Holmes (2004) calls the advent of a communication society, a post-modern world that is "anestheticized" by a seemingly endless flux of images and signs that are coopted and appropriated faster than we are able to consume or make sense of. What's more, interventionist media makes it difficult for us to understand the difference between a viral ad campaign (ie. OBEY for Levis) and a performative work by a contemporary artist. As visual culture is increasingly mediated and social art practices formalized, the political intention and potential impact of an artwork is thus jeopardized.

During interviews with each artist, the concept and theory of social practice was an issue that each spoke to in different ways. Peterson seemed quite skeptical of social practice, pointing out anyone can simply pose as a social art practitioner by engaging with a public and documenting it as art. Woolard in contrast seemed optimistic about what social practice forms might mean for a shift in the pedagogical aims of the art academy. She views the reemergence of social practice as something linked to more

artists exploring their own relationship to personal and collective identity, enabling a conversation about difference and subjectivity.

Thornton, especially in relationship to her MFA program, appears supportive of social practice and yet alarmed by its formalization. She explained for years she unknowingly cultivated a practice linked to social art forms, and her experience at CCA provided a language and means to understand this in context. Thornton however points to many of the problematic circumstances of the professionalization and institutionalization of social practice, which was once a space of freedom and experimentation, but has now been coopted by institutions.

Clark seemed to be the least interested in talking about social practice as a particular genre and form, explaining the notion of participation and experimental approaches to art making have a long history, from surrealism to minimalist sculpture. For Clark, the kind of DIY and cursory research used in these projects seems suspect and insufficient. She also questions the need to reject objects and our experience with these artworks as valuable, alluding to a privileging of social experience as a more affective art form. While each artist understands many of the contexts and trends linked to the artworld's recent fascination with socially engaged works, interestingly none felt a direct resonance with labeling or grouping their specific practice within these histories.

### **Institutionality and Power**

The institutionalization of social practice art has also produced a set of expectations for practitioners, impacting the way projects are approached and circulated. As discussed in Chapter III, a number of U.S. museums have offered major exhibitions

that include participation and social encounters in the form and content of these shows. This often includes a host of site-specific projects and education programs that offer publics different kinds of access to the museum. The Queens Museum's latest partnership with Queens College in New York to develop a Social Practice concentration in the MFA studio program is a prime example. Alongside a renovation of its physical building, the Queens Museum is now a destination for social practice projects, hosting the Open Engagement Social Practice Conference in 2014, and organizing public programs, studio spaces and residencies for artists.

While the move to institutionalize social practice opens possibilities for funding and collaboration, there are a number of concerns to consider as well. For the artists included in this study, the institutionalization of social practice is a double-edged sword. Clark, Peterson, Woolard and Thornton often rely on the cultural and financial capital of institutions, and yet demand an ongoing critique through their project-works. Thornton's discussion concerning the evolution of education programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art is particularly telling. She explains the idea of social practice was once an unknown territory where artists and educators had some freedom to experiment with the content and form of projects. Yet, as the value of social practice rose it was increasingly formalized and readily exploited:

Like before it was a way to recombobulate the resources of a school or a museum and make them into something public when nobody even knew what the value was, but now that value's been exploited and you better get in line or send an application...and there's 12 judges that are going to choose and select from 15,000 people. Maybe you'll get 500 dollars...



When asked if she thought institutions were actively aware and trying to remedy this trend, Thornton seems skeptical. She argues after the economic collapse of 2008, the decrease in federal and state funding for the arts created a new model of creative outsourcing, which now uses individuals and artists to further the mission that non-profit organizations once fulfilled:

It's the disaster of the nonprofit model reproduced through the individual...it's basically the stuff that the government once funded and they can't anymore so they'll give you a discount if you do it for them. Cause now there's not even enough money to sustain nonprofits so they funnel it to individuals who will take on the risk of the organization and do it on their own...

Thornton explains, artists who can market themselves the best and outline clear goals and expectations are given contracts for these projects even if their proposal does not necessarily make sense contextually.

In *What Does Public Mean?*, Tone Hansen (2006) discusses what he understands as the strategic restructuring of cultural institutions as private businesses in the past decade. Hansen explains, “art, culture and design once again, have become means of control and power over ‘public’ urban spaces”, especially in the wake of neoliberal austerity and the invention of a new “creative class” (pg. 11). The desire for new museums, waterfront esplanades and parks are now used as a political device and marketing tool for economic leverage and re-development. Hansen refers to this as a form of “New Public Management”, describing a tendency for municipal governments and agencies to use the same tools as corporations to market a specific version of culture and art to the public.

This has direct consequences for artists who are both positioned as complicit agents of this change, and yet resist and critique an increasingly commodified cultural arena. Hansen explains, artists that are aware of this complexity “use the institution more as a tool for critical investigations, rather than an old-fashioned, self-reflective institutional criticism” (pg. 16). Drawing from the work of Simon Sheikh (2006), Hansen describes a need to re-frame the art world as a collection of fragmented publics and counterpublics that resist the homogenization of the art world. He stresses, while artists hold a privileged position within this cultural field, they often do not possess the power to restructure the field altogether. Hansen argues the creation of independent spaces and groups that model new arrangements and styles may offer a counter-narrative to this privatization and build solidarity movements that continue this work.

In many ways, the artists in this study gesture toward this resistance, providing examples of different organizational forms and opportunities for public engagement that is not mediated by an institution. However, the lure of institutional support and funding is often difficult to resist when no other recourse is available. Woolard’s *Trade School* model offers an interesting deviation. While she has accepted funding from a number of foundations, the funds are equally distributed to the core group of organizers and used to increase the independent capacity of the project. Similarly, the free school platform that Clark helped co-found called the Knowledge Commons in Washington D.C., continues to use initial seed money to offer free community-based classes and workshops. Both organizations have resisted institutional affiliations that would absorb or take over these projects, working to cultivate an independent locus of organizers and volunteers.

However, the capacity to maintain independent projects is an ongoing issue that Woolard, Clark, Thornton and Peterson point to as a pressing concern. Woolard argues the only way to ensure the sustainability of these projects is to develop strategic community-based support that provides democratic accountability and a continued examination of the project's relationship with specific communities. In so doing, project-works can become a community-sourced and site-specific platform that is not overshadowed by an elite board of trustees that compromise a project's capacity for continued growth and change.

### **Dialogic Art and Radical Cosmopolitanism**

To address some of the shortcomings of social art practice's institutionalization, Grant Kester (1995, 2004) argues for "critical dialogic art" as a potential way of framing collaborative and participatory works in context. He describes dialogic art practices as a conversation that artists have with a situated community that unfolds "through a process of performative interaction" (pg. 112). Using works by Suzanne Lacy, the Wochenklausur, Stephan Willats and others, Kester makes a case for artworks that provide a space for self-critique and critical reflection with a public or audience from the project's inception.

In his later work, *The One and the Many*, Kester (2011) considers the broader historical context of modern avant-garde movements and socially engaged art's tension with autonomy and cooption. He describes a need for critical art practices to consider issues of individual and collective labor and the agonistic nature of aesthetic encounter and critique. Kester explains "a truly radical critique understands that every attempt at

making it better, however well intended, will always be perverted by it” (2011, pg. 113). As such, the intentions of a social engaged artwork should not demand a revisionary understanding of a particular issue or context, but rather open possibilities for continued reflection and ongoing engagement. This often requires artists to take risks, to make themselves vulnerable and confront the uncomfortable dimensions of the social and political dimensions of this work.

Susan Buck-Morss (2009) similarly argues for what she calls a “radical cosmopolitanism”, asking artists to “take seriously the responsibility that comes with our situations in the present division of global labour” (pg. 549). She implores artists and non-artists to find common ground, to recognize historical oppression and “create a social field that defies the boundaries, real and imagined...widening that field in the process” (pg. 549). Buck-Morss suggests a truly radical and transformative gesture in art is connected more to solidarity movements and transglobal politics, which create spaces of inclusivity and egalitarian exchange.

### **Public Pedagogy and Social Art Practice**

#### **Public Pedagogy’s Ethical Imperative**

To understand some of the practical and theoretical relationships between public pedagogy and social art practice, it is important to articulate what is meant by the term pedagogy. Pedagogy as a concept is often identified as the method or way of teaching and learning, which is distinct from a curriculum that is the object or device used to circulate a particular pedagogy. Gaztambide-Fernandez and Matute (2014) argue pedagogy is often generalized, pointing to the historical and philosophical meanings ignored in its use

and what they articulate as pedagogy's ethical imperative. They trace the etymological roots of pedagogy from the Greek "paidagogos" referring to a male slave who takes care of youth. Scholars like Mariolina Salvatori (1996) speculate there is a "relationship between the role of slavery in the history of the United States and the historical association between teacher and slave" (pg. 54). As the use of the term pedagogy has changed over time, this historical context is often overlooked.

Gaztambide-Fernandez and Matute explain we need to examine the assumptions made in the use of the term pedagogy and the power it can elicit. Using works from Roger Simon (1992), they explain pedagogy is closely linked to the interaction between learner and teacher, where there is always an attempt to influence the experience and the subjectivity of another. Pedagogy is then understood more in the context of power, something, which includes a particular intention and desire:

A relationship becomes pedagogical when one side seeks to provoke a particular kind of change or a different experience on another. (Gaztambide-Fernandez & Matute, 2014, pg. 58-59).

They also distinguish pedagogy from curriculum, related more to one's individual experience with artifacts like music, texts, movies or public spaces. When we confuse curricular aims with those of pedagogical intentions, we make an assumption about what is being learned and how.

In the context of the works presented here, this becomes an important distinction. Thornton, Peterson, Clark and Woolard's projects are not pedagogical because they occur in public or involve people, but rather the educative capacity of these exchanges is

located in the quality of participation and agency afforded to an audience. In the context of public pedagogy, institutional power is implicit in this relationship. Gaztambide-Fernandez and Matute (2014) explain pedagogical encounters must then be considered an implied site of ethics, because pedagogy always involves a desire or intention to engage a cultural artifact, idea or discourse of an institution.

Drawing from Allan Luke's (2008) notion of communal gifting, they argue for a "commitment of solidarity through the pedagogical encounter...", characterizing pedagogy as an expanding network of histories, political and sociocultural relationships (pg. 68). The idea of solidarity places a responsibility on the pedagogue to not only understand and reveal these networks, but also to intervene and disrupt them. This is described by Simon (1992) as a "pedagogy of possibility", which entails approaching practice:

...strategically, locally, and contextually within an integrated moral and epistemological stance...premised on communicative openness, the recognition of partiality, and a sense of collective venture. (pg. 61)

### **Public Pedagogy, Art and Participation**

As discussed in Chapter III, public pedagogy refers to learning that happens outside of school, ranging from sites like parks, museums and public spaces to popular cultures and public discourse. Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick (2011) explain public art and socially engaged projects circulate public pedagogies in their production of "aesthetic texts". These encounters and forms of provocation encourage "critical public dialogue" by interrupting public spaces and "dominant cultural scripts" (pg. 348). Suzi Gablick

(1995) describes this as a form of “connective aesthetics”, using embodied ways of knowing to facilitate “modes of reciprocal empathy” that confront and challenge the viewer (p. 82).

Springgay (2014) similarly points out that contemporary art is often used as an example of critical public pedagogy, describing a recent “educational turn” in art making that uses pedagogy as a material and concept. This includes artists and practitioners who “adopt research methods, focus on knowledge production and learning, and use educational forms...as a medium for artistic practice” (Springgay, 2014, pg. 133). While the works explored here by Woolard, Clark, Peterson and Thornton are not necessarily linked to this “educational turn” explicitly, they do draw from many of the practices Springgay describes.

In examining the political and ethical dimensions of this work, Springgay warns “pedagogy-as-art” projects can easily exploit or reify institutional systems and structures that it seeks to critique. She points out, Jana Graham’s (2010) argument that the artist must become a co-researcher and co-investigator in the creation of a pedagogically inclined artwork, and must not engage in:

...cultural production for the sake of exhibition or careerism but actively employ creative participation into changing and sustaining the lives of the people s/he works with. (Springgay, 2014, pg. 135)

Drawing from the work of Pablo Helguera (2011), Springgay explains we must understand the use and occurrence of participation to consider how these works operate pedagogically. Helguera describes four types of participation: nominal participation

where a viewer consumes art passively; directed participation where a viewer is instructed to finish a piece of art; creative participation in which a viewer adds something to the art; and finally collaborative participation where a viewer is involved in both developing the structure and content.

In Thornton's work, participation is often solicited through group performances in the form of workshops or public events. *Physical Audit* for example invited collaborators to participate in a series of movement-based experiences, which is partially a directed and creative form of participation. The *Beauty Salon* project in contrast was a more collaborative form of participation because the project involved a group of artists in creating the structure and form of the project from its inception. Woolard's work similarly attempts to provide a space for more collaborative forms of participation. *Trade School* and *OurGood's* organizing team for instance have regular meetings, vote on how to organize specific aspects of the project and then collectively implement these decisions.

*Trade School* also attempts to provide a collaborative space for participation between peers, but is limited in reach and scope due to issues of access and legibility outside of privileged art publics. Clark's work at Old Town is more a nominal form of participation; her performance as a ghost is passive, engendering little opportunity for critical exchange. Finally, Peterson's work on *Radio Transmission Ark* attempts to provide collaborative and creative form of participation, but is only partially successful because of the project's time limit and location within a privileged gallery space.



Springgay argues the modes of participation afforded to an audience thus impact the educative capacity of these practices. She argues for an expanded understanding of the relationships between artist, artwork and artist, and that participatory projects have two audiences: one developed for a specific public or individual, and the other for the art community. This “double ontology” requires artists to carefully examine how both audiences are being addressed, or run the risk of taking on “an institutionalized form of the colonial gaze” (Springgay, 2014, pg. 144). The participatory project needs to be understood as an artwork that will circulate as art, but also as an experience mediated between an artist and viewer.

In finding a way to continually negotiate one’s reflexivity and accountability to an audience, even after the project is over, the work is then able to take on a critical and pedagogical dimension. Through this reflective lens, viewers are invited to construct new meaning and association with whatever issue is provoked through the work. While this is always partially incomplete, the aim is to open a space of possibility where the “learning self is invited to play, to explore, to investigate partial knowledges in the making” (Sandlin & Milan, 2008, p. 344).

### **Cultural Resistance and Public Pedagogy**

Now that we have a better understanding of participation in the context of critical public pedagogy, we can examine some of the pedagogical particularities of each artist’s practice. Gert Biesta (2012) offers three ways of understanding public pedagogy that can help frame this discussion. The first is a type of pedagogy, which attempts to shape the subjectivity and identity of individuals by making them aware of social issues that are

marginalized in the public sphere. The second has more to do with an attempt to empower groups or individuals through political agency to address a shared concern. The third is described more as a gesture toward place making, an intervention or “staging of dissensus” to imagine an alternative conception of a place and its normative codes and signs. For Biesta public pedagogy is linked to a political reading of the public sphere, involving questions of freedom and agency. Using the work of Hannah Arendt (1977) he suggests public pedagogies unfold in our capacity to act and be free in our field of experience.

In Woolard’s work, public pedagogies circulate within an alternative discourse on labor and exchange offered through the *OurGoods* online platform and *Trade School*. The pedagogical intention of this work is not just resigned to a critique of economic systems, but also offers an expanded understanding of solidarity or what Woolard describes as “how to belong to each other differently”. This aligns with Biesta’s understanding of public pedagogy as tool for empowerment and awareness of socio-political issues of shared concern. However, Woolard is also able to create spaces that encourage individuals to explore oppositional and potentially counterpublic practices.

In the *Exchange Café* project at the MoMA for instance, Woolard invited organizations including Milk Not Jails, Feral Trade Courier and BeeSpace to offer locally sourced tea, milk and honey in exchange for donations of time, skills or knowledge. This provided a forum for publics to learn about issues ranging from biopolitics and the decline of native bee populations, the prison industry in Upstate New York, and how to harness the surplus freight potential of existing travel. Rather than hosting a series of

workshops, the framework of the café provided an opportunity for publics to barter directly with members of the group and potentially extend their learning through future involvement. Here Woolard transformed a static lobby space at one of the world's most frequented contemporary art museums into a place where publics are confronted with a range of social justice concerns as they enter the space. In re-imagining the intended use of the lobby, Woolard creates a site of cultural resistance, restructuring learning and shifting the viewer's relationship to labor and capital transaction.

This in many ways echoes Sandlin's (2010) work around the phenomena of culture jamming as a form of public pedagogy and resistance. She understands resistance as a site of conflict in our consumption and appropriation of dominant images, signs and stories in the public sphere. When individuals or groups propose an alternative to this dominant culture by inventing oppositional practices, a site of resistance is created. Sandlin situates this within Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2005) idea of a "transitional space", which allows us to "connect our inner realities to people, objects, and places outside ourselves" (Sandlin, 2010, pg. 298). Ellsworth argues for the importance of being in the midst of strangeness in order to challenge an essentializing cultural discourse and construct our own culture and knowledge around this political gesturing.

While the *Exchange Café* creates the conditions for a transitional space to unfold, it is only partially successful because it still exists within the confines of a privileged museum. Yet, critical public pedagogies are able to circulate through unique experiences with the space itself and the individuals representing each grassroots organization. This

opens the possibility for the quality, frequency and sustained effort of barter and exchange to motivate an ideological shift in the valuation of labor, goods and time.

### **Performative Public Pedagogies**

In the past several years Thornton has focused her attention on the institution of banking, paying particular interest to the way debt informs the personal activity, agency and ideology of people affected by it. Through performance work, lectures, workshops and visualizations, Thornton asks participants and viewers to re-imagine and better understand their relationship to economic institutions. In so doing Thornton hopes her audience may learn to cope or resist these institutions, opening up a space for meditative reflection and parodic critique.

In Norman Denzin's (2003) *Call to Performance*, he argues performances are pedagogical practices that make struggle and oppression visible. Performance art in particular is linked to a history of resistance and global theater movements that draw from political and feminist performance work and public art (Garoian 1999). Here Denzin develops an idea of "performance art pedagogy", which he describes as a reflexive strategy for critiquing "the cultural metaphors that codify and stereotype the [racial] self and the body" (Garoian 1999, p. 44).

Although Thornton's work does not expressly explore the performativity of the body, she does invoke forms of embodiment to circulate public pedagogies. In January 2012, Thornton organized a series of performative tours at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SF MoMA) to coincide with an exhibition of artist Richard Serra's work (Richard Serra Urgent Debt Tours). Using Serra's sculptures as an opportunity to discuss

debt, Thornton calculated the raw material cost of each sculpture and appraised the value of its inflation over the past several decades. The re-interpreted value of each work invited participants to visualize their relationship to debt as a sculptural form. The tours ended with a group performance, asking participants to walk out of the museum and onto the street while wearing a large piece of black fabric that covered their bodies. Thornton imagined this performance as a kind of group visualization of debt embodied as a moving sculptural mass in dialogue with Serra's often-immovable sculptures.

**Figure 32. Richard Serra Urgent Debt Tour – 2012**



In the collective and individual experiences facilitated, Thornton was able to circulate a critical public pedagogy that not only critiques the privileged museum space of the SF MoMA, but also offers an alternative means to understand and visualize debt through the body. The use of participatory performance art here allows publics to enter into dialogue with Thornton, and cultivates a site of resistance in a space that is typically resigned to passive viewing. This in many ways approaches Denzin's conception of "performance art pedagogy", securing a space to imagine a new "cultural metaphor" that confronts the industry of student loan and credit card debt by subverting Serra's sculptures as a visual metaphor. For publics witness to the performance outside the

museum, the visual spectacle of bodies moving together onto the streets of San Francisco interrupts the daily routine of street life and offers an opportunity for provocation and further dialogue.

However, like some of Thornton's previous work, the tours may be difficult for some to understand or access, compromising the critical and pedagogical dimension of the work. The performance also does not expressly explore the gendered and racialized context of the body, but rather uses the group to create a social sculpture to communicate the "weight" of debt. What's more, in locating the performance primarily in a museum that only some can afford to access (admission is \$18), the issue of economic equity is only partially addressed.

### **Digital Storytelling and Public Pedagogy**

In Clark and William's *Native Stars* project, the use of digital storytelling and collaborative media production provide a context to consider public pedagogy. Clark's initial intentions were to provide a space for participants to unearth and examine the histories of the Anacostia and produce an audio recording in response. As dialogue and experiences with the group unfold, the focus of the project shifted to reflect the raced and classed realities of living in and around Southeast D.C. The music produced by youth offers a unique kind of public pedagogy, using hip-hop beats, rap and spoken word poetry as a reflective storytelling device. As Clark begins to work with Peterson at the Honfluer Gallery, these stories are able to circulate to a wider audience and provide a counter narrative to assumptions made about the neighborhood and youth who live there.

In many ways the music and stories recorded serve as a curriculum to this experience that draws from popular cultures and knowledge culled from the group and peers. In one track, Andre “Jus Dre” Williams offers a glimpse into the racially charged tensions of living D.C.:

...you don’t know about shit, what you know about this, what you know about that...ok ok ok. Let’s go...what you know about white, tell me what you know about gray. Us Niggas ain’t gonna get no money, ain’t gonna get no break.

Here William’s lyrics tell a story of Anacostia that would otherwise be diluted or mediated by commercial media. As a collaborative artwork produced within the purvey of the Smithsonian, critical public pedagogies are able to circulate beyond William’s own personal network.

This connects in many ways to Giroux’s (2000) conception of public pedagogy as a form of cultural politics. For Giroux cultural pedagogies extend from our relationship to popular culture and are bound to “struggles over specific representations, identities and forms of agency” (pg. 352). Public pedagogy is a way to call attention to these issues of difference, providing a means to intervene and perhaps respond in turn. Giroux points to digital popular cultures as place for this to unfold, arguing they are “an important resource for kids to develop their own cultural identities and sense of social agency” (Giroux, 2001a, p. 23).

While the project does open a space to explore issues of representation, the potential to critically examine underlying economic and socio-cultural is only partially approached. This is due partly to Clark’s initial ethnographic positioning and the time

constraints determined by the Hirshhorn's ArtLab programming. In this sense, the project may have benefited from more open-ended musical collaborations and sound experiments, where the voices of youth can surface more readily.

Finally, considering Peterson's work in relationship to public pedagogy brings to light a number of issues. As a socially engaged artwork, *Radio Transmission Ark* creates a platform for storytelling and site-specific research and investigation. Peterson and Reynolds interview people at a local Laundromat, record a neighborhood association meeting, invite local musicians to free style and bring youth from the ArtLab into the Honfluer Gallery to share their music. The radio here provides a site for public pedagogies to circulate within the neighborhood and through online communities, offering radio as a medium for new and existing knowledges to emerge.

While the project was only a month-long experiment, *Radio Transmission Ark* is an ongoing project that Peterson continues to use in his own practice as both a form of documentation and a tool for storytelling. Peterson offers this as an opensource platform, conducting several workshops focused on sound production at the Knowledge Commons and Honfluer Gallery. Participants learn how to setup their own radio platform, how to conduct field recordings and use the experience of radio to create public spaces for exchange and conversation. Through these encounters, the project provides a way to decenter and critique dominant media outlets, by empowering individuals to create their own tools for sharing and producing media.

Triggs et al. (2010) point out the potential for re-appropriating public spaces as an opportunity to share and collect stories, produce valuable forms of public pedagogy. They



describe public pedagogies as opportunities for stories and networks to emerge alongside the creation of a “flexible and responsive public space” (pg. 331). Storytelling in particular helps extend an understanding of historical events and ideas beyond particular circumstances or “tellings” of these histories, inviting the invention of new languages and spaces. Cinema, music and film are identified as salient contexts for this to unfold.

In many respects, *Radio Transmission Ark* provides a means to access Triggs et al.’s (2010) notion of public pedagogy. By inviting communities and neighbors into an art gallery that’s been transformed into a pop-up radio station, Peterson creates the conditions for something new to emerge. A remixing of popular cultures, of stories and experiences construct a temporary archive of activities and cultural histories that are site-specific and particular to this arrangement. In the liminal spaces created, potentially new understandings of Anacostia begin to manifest. What’s more, in offering *Radio Transmission Ark* as an opensource platform and by conducting free workshops inside the gallery, Peterson cultivates a democratic space around and within the project.

### **Focus Group Reflections**

In final reflections from Peterson, Clark, Thornton and Woolard gathered during a focus group session, a number of common threads emerged. In all of the responses, there was a concern for more time and deep engagement with youth or publics through their work and conversations about the role of creativity in schools. Thornton and Clark specifically remarked on the challenge of introducing new ways of understanding and approaching art that students may not be accustomed to, and how this rubs against the

mold of a traditional arts education. Peterson also reiterated his concerns about the state of art education its continued reliance on outdated and formalist strategies:

Art education is well placed to observe and address the rhythms in our lives. Rhythms between the wood and the road, between people and groups of people, analog and digital, physical and virtual, etc. The problem is that we have the required equipment to do some truly radical things as artists but we are being educated as though it were 100 years ago.

In projects involving institutions, participants described how boundaries and expectations were subverted under the radar, sometimes going unnoticed and prompting a change in a project's scope and form. Thornton recalled a number of experiences working for non-profits where she would change lesson plans and content to fit the expectations of a funder, but actually perform something different in the classroom. There is also an acknowledgement that the paperwork and metrics involved in measuring the outcomes of these projects are ineffective and further marginalize one's participation. When this experience is boiled down to quantitative data, participants explained this obscures the true value and potential of these encounters and projects.

Peterson recalls several jobs in which he was required to fill out an inordinate amount of paperwork that seemed to him unnecessary and linked to positivist metrics and frameworks. Thornton also agreed the institutional pressure to produce and create something specific in the classroom influences one's approach and confidence as both an artist and educator. All four agreed that art education, in whatever form it takes, is not something that can be measured with our current language because it involves the unconscious, the sensate and indeterminate ways of knowing. This is perhaps the greatest

asset of this form of learning, but also presents one of the greatest challenges to their continued support and innovation.

Finally, there was also a critical awareness of social art practices, their pitfalls and inequities, and yet simultaneously participation within the very institutions that coopt them. Economic forces are a large contributor to this phenomenon, as the teaching/artist is underpaid and underemployed across media and discipline. This evokes a kind of survivalist mentality that can at times prompt an artist to compromise vision, or engage in menial educative exercises for the sake of paying bills and putting food on the table. Involvement with diverse groups of people also tends to shift and change depending on regional contexts and institutional affiliation. In most cases, socio-economic privilege and location is a primary factor in distancing some groups of youth disproportionately from art education projects involving alternative methodologies.

This is connected in large part to trends in American's attitude toward the arts, which have been in decline since the 1950s, but also signals a shift in focus toward science, math and reading as core subject areas and tools necessary for job creation (Hedberg & Rabkin, 2011). This places art education in a precarious bind where the most innovative projects are often situated in communities of privilege that can afford to take the risk in supporting these efforts. Some teaching artists are critically aware of these phenomena and address it in their work, but some are unable or unwilling to confront this for risk of losing their job. This perhaps demands a reconsideration of unschooling strategies in both teacher education, teaching artist preparation, and implementation of art education programs.

## **Conclusion**

### **Summary of Findings**

- The socially engaged artworks explored in this study are able to circulate critical public pedagogies when collaborative forms of participation are shared meaningfully with publics from the project's inception
- Socially engaged works can offer alternatives to conventional arts education involving experiential, project and place-based approaches to learning and critical pedagogy
- Teaching artists and artists negotiate complex and shifting identities in the development of post-studio artworks, which complicate their capacity to critically examine their practice
- The institutionalization of social practice and public pedagogy impacts the ethical and political scope of work created with particular communities
- The relationship between art and art education remains a tenuous negotiation that privileges certain forms of aesthetic experience and access to these experiences
- Socially engaged artists continue to use their authorial power to access communities, while critical arts pedagogy is predominantly available to privileged middle to upper class white students and publics

### **Cultivating Cultural Ecosystems and Solidarity**

As cultural spaces and schools re-think and continue to organize art education initiatives around the country, how can they best interface with socially engaged artists and projects? Can these practices and projects travel across geographies and school

systems? Is there a place for “scaling” and expanding these efforts, and what systems should be in place to ensure artists and institutions alike remain critically engaged in this work? Although answers to these questions are complex and site-specific, there are a number of ways artists and institutions can draw from existing networks and imagine new connections.

To begin this effort, it may be advantageous for artists and institutions to collectively map existing resources, needs and desires through democratic forums and conversation. Often we only have a partial understanding of networks in our own communities and how privilege, class, race and gender determine membership within these networks. In offering a space to interrogate and examine this, communities can identify what is already “working” and potentially build new connections and synchronicities. Although the tendency may be to create a formal partnership like an arts council to house and maintain these networks, a more distributed, decentralized and hyper-local model may offer a better option for larger cities or rural communities.

However, to really sustain and cultivate communities of practice, institutions and artists need to fundamentally re-think how they frame art education initiatives. On one hand, institutions, schools and foundations have a tendency to consider this work as irrelevant or temporary due to limited funding and a privileging of math and reading in the classroom. On the other hand, artists often view education as something separate from art practice, delimiting the potential for artists to fluidly engage a school or cultural space without a curriculum to guide or mediate this experience. As Thornton points out in discussing the Teaching Artist Union, the incidental role of the teaching artist engenders

a feeling of alienation and isolation, expressing concerns over not having a shared space to meet or collaborate, temporary contracts, poor working conditions and high turnover rates. This makes the cultivation of communities of practice difficult to approach, because the teaching artist is viewed as merely a contractual obligation and not necessarily an integral member of a team.

The Guggenheim's interpretive guide program may offer some useful ideas. Instead of ignoring the role and physical presence of security guards, the museum offered a space for these guards to train as docents and to be included in tours and education programs. While there are a number of ethical issues implicit in this gesture, there is an attempt on part of the institution to at least recognize these individuals and foster ways for security guards to have a more connected role to the spaces they occupy and engage with regularly. What would it mean for artists to develop a meaningful role within an institution, not just as a temporary employee but also as an integral community member and stakeholder? An institution for instance can include artists in the programmatic planning, grant writing and vision for working with partners before a project is launched. A council or panel of artists and educators can meet with the board of trustees, or simply hosting a regular potluck series may provide a more intimate space for educators to gain trust, friendship and solidarity amongst their shared networks.

Institutions can also play a pivotal role in helping to define and examine the work of social practitioners through collaborative forums and meetings. While the public may not understand the language of social art practice, ongoing conversations can help situate these tactics historically and provide a space to consider their use in schools or civic

spaces. The Queens Museum offers a number of examples, providing workshops, lectures and ongoing projects that explore the role of socially engaged work in NYC and beyond. However, to ensure resiliency and avoid cooption, artists and institutions need to be wary of tendencies to codify and replicate these practices. Whenever guidelines, rules and best practices are created, inequitable systems can easily emerge and give license to individuals or institutions to police creativity. The recent fad of “placemaking” for instance is now used in cities around the country as a way to stimulate economic development and bring art to downtown cultural hubs. Although well intentioned, placemaking assumes a place is not already defined by a historical past and that it requires an artist to somehow activate or transform this place for it to have value.

Issues of power and privilege are always bound to a socially engaged work, which impact the capacity to sustain rhizomatic connections. This necessitates critical care in negotiating the kinds of projects taken on by institutions and artists, the structures of participation imagined, and expectations assumed. Although a grant may require a percentage of at-risk populations to be included in a project, one should not blindly approach a community located in an impoverished neighborhood and assume they need certain resources. Meaningful partnerships take time to build and require mutual risk and compromise for communities to develop a legitimate stake in the organization. This allows communities of solidarity to emerge, where both parties are accountable to maintaining relationships over time.

The physical architecture of public spaces and institutions is also something to reconsider. As Woolard points out in her discussion on the *Exchange Café* project at the

MoMA, and *Trade School* at the Whitney, museums are still primarily tourist destinations and not necessarily civic spaces where most feel welcome. While museums organize family days and free workshops, this is often not enough to break down the physical and perceptual barriers between communities and these privileged spaces. Why can't the lobby spaces of museums also serve as a co-working environment and offer childcare? Can we imagine shared public kitchens for people to have lunch together? How can the museum become a civic center like a post office or library where people can access job training resources, education programs and health services past 6pm? Why can't more gift shops sell locally made artworks?

A number of museums are beginning to experiment with space and place. The Walker Art Center for instance transformed a green space next to the museum into what they call a "cultural commons" (Open Field) for community members to share skills and ideas. The Hirshhorn Museum's ArtLab program offers a space for teens to gather with regular hours and no pre-condition for membership. Although these are great programs, it's also important to understand that simply creating a new initiative to accommodate "civic engagement" is never sufficient. As Becker (1993) attests, most people have strong opinions about art and maintain a certain expectation of how cultural spaces should be arranged. This makes change difficult to approach, but not impossible altogether. To build trust and re-imagine how institutional spaces function within the public sphere, we need to radically re-consider issues of access and privilege and offer opportunities for diverse communities to participate in this re-visioning.



Time and long-term engagement are crucial to this debate. In several instances, Woolard echoed this throughout her interview, explaining transformative learning and community building requires a long-term commitment from both the community of people involved and the artist/teacher cultivating a space for education. Although funding structures and logistics make this difficult, institutions can work toward deeper engagement with schools or neighborhood groups, in addition to facilitating workshops and tours for a broader public. This may require a redistribution of resources and priorities on an administrative level, as well as identifying unique partnerships to reposition time commitments and structures of participation.

The Hester Street Collaborative in New York City for instance works with only a few schools located near its offices in Chinatown, collaborating with a group of students to re-design outdoor spaces and investigate the architecture of public space through six month or year long partnerships. They purposefully cap the number of students involved at 15-20 and invite a teaching artist to engage this group throughout the year. While the granting report may not have an impressive number of participants, their slow-build approach is often more affective than trying to dilute this work over a larger population. What they've found through their efforts is students engaged in these programs typically become interns, help lead autonomous art projects in their neighborhoods, and become a connecting node for the Hester Street's mission.

Funding is of course a key concern in cultivating these long-term partnerships. Grant-funded projects for instance require a plan for evaluation, discrete timelines and clearly mapped goals before an artist/teacher is included in the conversation. Creating

programs with the express purpose of fulfilling these requirements limits the potential for inclusive dialogue and impacts the ethical dimensions of the project. Similarly, fair wages and valuation of creative work can be easily dismissed or compromised when institutions feel pressure to fulfill these contractual obligations. Yet, as Woolard's *OurGoods* and *Trade School* projects demonstrate, there are a variety of ways institutions can celebrate the work of artists and educators beyond merely offering a paycheck or honorarium. In addition to fair pay, cultural organizations can offer subsidized or free studios and collaborative spaces for co-working. The vacant lot by a museum can be used to grow food and start a CSA for educators or artists, or artists can offer a skillshare with a school or museum staff in return for their participation in an art project or initiative. In creating structures for exchange and intimacy outside of a money system, there is a potential for institutions and artists to become a supportive structure that includes a diverse community, and not just cultural managers maintained by an elite board.

In many ways, communities across the U.S. have everything they need to create solidarity networks amongst social practitioners. The key to sustaining and building these rhizomatic relationships depends on the degree of openness and criticality used to interrogate these practices and how communication is structured between stakeholders. This is not an easy task and one that will necessarily require struggle, sacrifice and risk on the part of institutions, municipalities and artists. We also have to be careful not to simply replicate, adapt or transpose what has already worked in other communities, because art and education partnerships are nuanced and change over time. What “works” for a community in East Los Angeles may be entirely different from what works in

downtown Austin, TX. When we make assumptions about how creativity works like Richard Florida's notion of the "rise of the creative class" we ignore how cultural networks operate in mysterious, ephemeral and uncertain ways. Understanding these complexities requires practitioners and institutions to constantly revise and breath life into these efforts and to critically interrogate their political and social dimensions.

Cooperative grocery stores, community gardens, time banks and credit unions provide a salient context for resource sharing and networked community. The key to their "success" revolves around a collective vision for how time is valued, open and inclusive membership, and a shared understanding of engaged involvement within these structures. The artworld makes a considerable effort to distance itself from these political assertions, offering instead a neutral space that erases difference and promotes disjuncture. To imagine a more networked culture, the positionalities of schools, cultural spaces, artists, educators and institutions should be located and critically examined. This allows the group to be held accountable to each other and understand who gets to be involved, what a community is working toward, and how participation is facilitated within this network.

We all have a stake in negotiating the health of cultural ecosystems because they involve the public sphere and institutions we participate in daily. While the looming threat of cooption is always something to be wary of, the increasing popularity of social practice makes these considerations an urgent and relevant task for institutions. In securing pluralistic, cooperative and democratic spaces to enter into dialogue, this effort is not impossible but rather something that requires time and mutual trust from an array of stakeholders and communities.

## **Mycological Provisions**

In other words, to make connections one needs not knowledge, certainty, or even ontology, but rather a trust that something may come out, though one is not yet completely sure what. (Rajchman, 2000, pg. 78)

Everything seems to be happening at once, just as John Cage predicted. A global disaster capitalism emerges from our industrial past. A postmodern critical turn is now coopted by the very institutions it sought to critique. And even decades after Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of critical pedagogy has transformed education, a cult of accountability and "excellence" reform persists like a plague. As a new post-democracy surfaces, we are determined to get the revolution of the 1960s right this time, yet without sacrificing the luxury of the market or comforts of science. We resist and repeat, and the institutions of art and education are used to rationalize how and why.

As we saw in Chapter II, a range of scholars have responded in turn, offering feminist, critical and post-formal epistemologies to aid in understanding and resisting these prevailing trends. This provided a context to examine contemporary approaches to art education and social practice explored in Chapter III, bringing to light a number of ongoing challenges faced by artists and educators in the field today. While these practitioners offer a space to critique and re-imagine this work, the institutions of art and education continue to demand a quantifiable language to measure and assess the "value" of art education. However, as discussed throughout, "real learning" through art is precisely aligned with an indeterminate journey, arriving at that which cannot be named. As this debate endures, the boundaries between art and education widen and compromise

our capacity to cultivate imaginative and critical thinking sorely needed as we face urgent moral and ecological crises.

The thing to do as Cage (1961) says, is “gather up one’s ability to respond and go on at varying speeds” (pg. 186). As if on cue, the contemporary artist and pedagogue have responded with a renewed interest in collaborative, relational, and participatory art practices. While many of these gestures are well intentioned, artists and institutions continue to exert an authorial power and privilege that echoes Grant Kester’s (1995) idea of “aesthetic evangelicalism”. Everyone can now be a social crusader supported by some non-profit or cultural organization using social reform as a marketing tool to build an audience, increase attendance, and maximize social capital (Bishop, 2012). If left unexamined, these attempts to restore the “social bond” may do more harm than good. As the stories presented in Chapter V illustrate, the particularities of this issue are complex and difficult to locate because they involve a shifting terrain of political, cultural, and social discourses.

Yet hope persists. Many in the field, like Woolard, Peterson, Clark and Thornton are actively working toward ideas of social justice, equity, and solidarity in their work. They are organizing projects that change the ways we approach, interact and consider issues of power and struggle. In this exchange, a new hybridized cultural practitioner emerges, straddling the boundaries of cultural production, education and art practice. They draw from a distributed and rhizomatic set of identities informed by their positionalities as people, artists and life-long learners, expanding the possibilities for new and emergent ways to live, work and play. As they create alongside institutions, inside

schools, and in public spaces their work cultivates post-formal approaches to learning and counterpublic pedagogies that allow youth and publics to critically engage in meaningful socio-political issues.

Chapter V provides a context to consider how these socially engaged practices unfold pedagogically. While each artist developed a unique set of strategies to achieve this, collaborative forms of participation and exchange were integral to securing spaces for both learning and aesthetic experience. Acts of parody, storytelling, creative media production, and performance were used throughout to encourage critical thought and political action. Thornton's use of debt as a material for performance, Peterson's play with radio as a platform for storytelling, Woolard's use of barter for instruction, and Clark's exploration of historical re-enactment, reject conventional art education strategies, invoking Ellsworth's (2005) notion of the learning self. This work relies on risk, chance, and site-specific struggle to guide encounters that are not always pedagogically inclined, but necessarily involve forms of learning in their receivership and participation.

However, while these projects continue to push the boundaries of what art and education can be, issues of access and privilege remain a key concern. Critical approaches to arts pedagogy are rarely afforded to the communities that may benefit the most from an alternative approach to education, typically available to white middle to upper class youth and publics. The reflective capacity of socially engaged artists is connected to this issue and is partially addressed in the works presented here, but still requires ongoing examination. Mackenzie's (2000) idea of "reflective equilibrium",

Kester's (2011) idea of dialogic art, and Ricouer's (1992) proscription of "narrative identity" may offer practitioners a means to enter into critical dialogue with their work and the publics involved.

Considering this, the accounts offered here do not provide a definitive model of a "new art education", but more of a gestural understanding of the kind of complex negotiations between art and pedagogy already at work. These critical public pedagogies seek more than an emancipatory release from corporate and popular cultures, but open up spaces of possibility for something new to emerge. Alongside these newly opened liminal spaces, there is also a need to recognize the limits of social practice and the ethical dilemmas presented through this work. As a political activity and pedagogical gesture, social practitioners need to make visible their positionality and ideological intention. In refusing to fully acknowledge this accountability, artists may compromise the work's critical capacity. In several examples we were able to look closely at how these ethical obligations were obscured by the complexity of teacher/artist identity and participant's unwillingness to clearly define their intended role or intention within a project.

Epistemologically, the metaphor of the mushroom allows us to interrogate and trouble the social, political and cultural aspects of these issues. Here fungi offer a metaphor and material to understand these relationships as interconnected, and decenter what an art educator, teaching artist, and teacher can and should be. This brings together aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome, Cage's (1961) notion of indeterminacy and the epistemological framework of post-formal thinking to build a fertile soil where cultural and educative ecosystems can thrive. Here, arts-based pedagogy is re-imagined

as one of many devices to agitate hegemonic and oppressive systems, while providing mutualistic frameworks for dialogic learning. As a tangled mycelia web of experience and practice, this expanded field is not a totalizing conceit but rather an access point, a “hyphae” through which we can situate our own subjectivities and the political autonomy of art practice.

What’s more, in acknowledging the experimental work that already exists within the fields of both art and education, we can learn from and celebrate a community of creative practitioners working in-between the cracks and fissures of possibility. This may offer inspiration for practitioners, arts administrators, funders and educators to step outside of the accepted territories of what art education is, and imagine what it might be: a political tool, a communicative gesture, an open-ended inquiry and aesthetic experience that provokes new understandings and inquiries about how the world works and why. What we need today is not more reforms or new systems that reframe old habits as new styles, but rather something entirely different, perhaps a mycological provision. Here we can move “from one idea to another as though we were [mushroom] hunters” (Cage, 1963, pg. 21).



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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Greetings,

I'm writing to you today to request your voluntary participation in a research study sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro called Mycological Provisions. The study is a critical qualitative research project focused on the experience of artists involved in new forms of participatory art making and public pedagogy. The aim of the project is to decenter a traditional understanding of artists and art educators, by considering their shifting identity in relationship to social practice, labor politics, and place among other issues. I plan to use mycology (the study of mushrooms) as a lens and metaphor to explore the 'rhizomatic' identity of each person involved, contributing new and original research on the changing nature of contemporary art education. Eventually, each engagement will help construct a field guide that will bring together images, stories and artworks in a layered portrait of each participant.

The methods used in the research study will be **qualitative** (survey, interview and a focus group) focusing on the experience of participants working in the fields of art and education. The data collection will consist of three engagements. The first will be an introductory survey conducted via email requiring approximately 2 hours of your time. The second engagement will consist of an in-person interview - a guided walking tour and mushroom hunt at a location near your home - lasting approximately 3 hours. This will be setup beforehand in a way that is convenient and accessible to you. The final engagement will be a focus group facilitated via Skype asking research participants to reflect and share stories about their mushroom hunt, lasting approximately 2 hours. The final two engagements – mushroom hunt and focus group - will be documented with an audio recorder, after gaining your permission to do so.

I thought of you immediately when creating the proposal and wondered if you would be involved? I'm hoping to organize for sometime this summer. Please respond to this inquiry expressing your interest in participating in this study. Thanks in advance for your time and consideration.

Christopher Kennedy

**Logistics:**

- **What:** Mycological Provisions, a dissertation research project
- **Contact:** Christopher Kennedy, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, [clkenne@uncg.edu](mailto:clkenne@uncg.edu), (201) 981-1576



- **Time Required:** (2 hour pre-interview survey; 3 hour interview; 2 hour focus group)
- **Questions or Concerns** about Participating in a Research Study, please contact Cristy McGoff in the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORMS

**Project Title:** Mycological Provisions

**Project Director:** Christopher Kennedy

**Participant's Name:**

**Estimated Time Required:** 7 hours

**About the Study**

Mycological Provisions is a critical qualitative research project focused on the experience of four teaching artists involved in new forms of participatory art making and public pedagogy. The project will facilitate a mushroom hunt with each participant, using this encounter as a unique platform for collaborative dialogue, interview, and reflection on contemporary art education. The aim of the project is to use the stories collected from each engagement to decenter a traditional understanding of teaching artists, by considering their shifting identity – as both artists and teachers - in relationship to experiments in social practice, labor politics, and place among other issues. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why are you asking me?**

You have been selected to participate in this study based on your previous experience as an artist and teacher working in new and experimental ways within K-12, University and/or community-based settings in the United States.

**What will you ask me to do?**

Participants will be asked to engage in dialogue with Principal Investigator, Christopher Kennedy, respond to a survey, and participate in an interview session and focus group. The specific details and time required for each of these three engagements are outlined for you below:

**Time Required**

1. Pre-Interview Survey: An introductory survey will be conducted via email. Each participant will be sent a series of 12 questions and asked to respond accordingly. This will require approximately 2 hours of response time.
2. Interview: An in-person interview will include a mushroom hunting excursion near each participant's place of residence lasting for approximately 3 hours. During this time, participants will be asked a series of questions about their practice and work, documented with an audio recorder. This will be setup beforehand in a convenient and accessible manner for all participants.

3. **Focus Group:** Finally a focus group will be organized with all four participants for approximately 2 hours to gather final thoughts and ideas via Skype. The focus group will offer participants additional time and space to reflect on each engagement, and to respond to communicate directly to other teaching artists involved. A series of follow-up questions will guide this process. Participants will have the option to remain anonymous throughout and can opt out of the focus group.
4. Participants may be re-contacted to discuss transcript accuracy.

Total Time: 7 hours

**Is there any audio/video recording?**

Interview and focus group sessions will be recorded using an audio tape recorder. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in the confidentiality section below

**Potential Risk:**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Cristy McGoff in the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Christopher Kennedy who may be contacted at (201) 981-1576, [clkenned@uncg.edu](mailto:clkenned@uncg.edu) or Dr. Leila Villaverde at [levillav@uncg.edu](mailto:levillav@uncg.edu) (336) 392-6983.

**Benefits to Society:**

Mycological Provisions will offer original research on art education, its changing role in K-12 schools and community settings, and offer a portrait of contemporary teaching artists experimenting with new practices and models for engagement. This is particularly relevant as schools and educational institutions address an increasingly apathetic student body, the loss of critical thinking capacity, a disconnect with place and a lack of moral discernment. The study may offer a much needed glimpse of emergent pedagogical practices that merge communicative instruments, performative encounters, architectural intervention, digital media experimentation and other critical vehicles for expression sorely needed as schools become more standardized and focus more on “job and college readiness”.

**Benefits to Participant:**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Cost or payments made:**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All data and information collected will be stored off-site in a locked file cabinet and kept in a lock-box at all times research is not being actively conducted. Pseudonyms will be used to identify participants throughout the study. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. This study includes audio recording. All recordings will be obtained digitally, and kept on a secure computer that is password protected and can only be accessed by the primary investigator. All files on the original device will be deleted after transfer to this secure location.

**Need to Leave the Study:**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data, which has been collected, be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

**Providing New Information:**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Christopher Kennedy.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY

1. Describe some of your experiences of school and education – specifically K-12, and/or University-level experiences. In what ways has your experience of school influenced your personal or professional identity?
2. The school is often considered an exclusive and isolated site for learning and education. Yet Irit Rogoff comments: “Education is wickedly in and of the world’s ongoing complexities...” Do you agree with Rogoff’s statement? Do you have your own vision of what education could or should be? What is your teaching/learning style?
3. How does your personal geography (the place you live) influence your practice, and your personal identity? Is place a primary consideration in your projects? Why?
4. Miwon Kwon often writes about the tension between nomadic and place-based lifestyles in the arts noting they are often confused “to such an extent that a certain romanticism has accrued around the image of a cultural worker on the go.” Do you agree with her? How do you navigate these terrains – of wanting to collaborate with others around the world/country, and perhaps a desire to set down roots in a specific place?
5. Our identities shift throughout the course of a day, a project or period in one’s life. How does your role as artist, educator or facilitator change throughout the course of a project you take on? Do you find yourself changing roles often? How

do you think this may influence the projects you develop, and the approaches used?

6. Have you considered yourself an *educator or teacher* in past projects or job experiences? What has this role meant to you? How was this role defined by an institution you may have worked for or been affiliated with?
7. Please describe your art practice. How has this practice evolved over time? Are there pedagogical aims in your art practice? What makes a project “successful” to you?
8. What are some of the economic and social pressures of being an artist, or teaching artist? Do you find this limits the work you’d like to take on? How much income are you able to generate for a project, teaching opportunity, or part-time job? Is this enough to support your practice/life
9. Thinkers like Claire Bishop, Jacques Ranciere, Grant Kester and others write about the historical and recent occurrence of “social art practice”. Bishop in particular is often critical of artists and institutions that use this term, claiming they often neglect issues of race, class, gender and power in their work with communities. She also describes an attempt to restore a social bond, and the use of art as a “privileged utopic vehicle” to fix a social problem. What do you think about this claim? Have you witnessed evidence of this in your own experience with other creatives?
10. The relationship between art and politics has always been a tenuous one. Do you consider your work political? Can art be political within a conventional

institutional framework? Does your artwork have a particular social, cultural or political aim?

*Is there anything else you would like to share?*

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Robert Peterson**

1. Can you talk more about your work in Haiti and Jamaica?
2. How does Radio Ark Transmission relate to or confront the institution of commercial radio? Does it coopt and subvert it? Is it more about storytelling and simply providing an outlet for something?
3. Are you interested in the museum as a site or context for exploring work or projects?
4. Arthur Doyle's music seems to explore this concept of 'living artfully' and making art as a part of one's everyday life. What does this mean to you personally?
5. In your work at the *Ghetto Biennial*, what are some of the issues of class, race and colonialism confronted? Does an 'art exhibition' make sense for a community already marginalized?
6. The context of race and class seem to interweave in your work. Is this something that stems from your relationship to the South? Are you positioning yourself in a post-colonial ethic?
7. It seems like the places you've been to and the people you've aspired to work with are physically and conceptually occupying in-between spaces. Islands like Jamaica and Haiti, free jazz soul improvisation etc. Are you attracted to these places because they are mysterious, indefinable, transitory? Something else?



8. What is sound to you as a concept? Is it just a collection of noises pointed at a particular direction, is it always music or is it something else?

**Cassie Thornton**

1. You've worked for a long time within and around major institutions – education, economics, art – is there a sense that you're trying subvert, coopt or use these platforms? Re-imagine them?
2. What is your relationship to power when you are working in collaboration with pre-existing or new groups of people (unions, choirs, communities)? How do your practices change/alter within a group dynamic? Are you interested in being in charge? Leading a group to some new horizon?
3. Performance and performativity of the body is a big piece of what you do in projects like *Physical Audit*. Do you consider yourself a performer in these works? Do you rely on the unscripted participation of others? Is it more messy that this?
4. You often working through really large immaterial concepts – beauty, debt, learning – is this a kind of philosophical exercise for you? Are you able to find answers to questions you've posed that are sufficient to you? What's happening in projects like *Wealth of Debt* when you make debt (immaterial) into something material – ie. a paper mache rock made from receipts?
5. How is your art a form of research? For whom are you presenting and sharing this research? Is your hope to make complexity vernacular? More “real”?

6. You seem to always be on a quest for the “Real” – spaces untouched by extreme consumption – yet you also strive toward a kind of imaginary in your work. How do you navigate this tension between the real and the imaginary? Are you trying to find an in-between space?
7. You’ve always had an attachment to the mystical – tarot readings, crystal balls, smoke machines. Are you trying to piece together a new kind of contemporary ritual or ceremony in your practices?
8. Can you talk more about this idea of success? “There is a connection between going to school to become a successful person and acquiring debt—as if borrowing is necessary for healthy maturation, which makes the work done in school into another production of debt in a new form.” What is success to you?
9. Can you speak to your experience as a teaching artist in New York?

**Caroline Woolard**

1. Can you talk about “the subjective nature of value”? What do you think should be taught inside of schools about things like the “market” and “capitalism”?
2. Can you talk about this idea of “re-ordering desire”? What does desire mean in this context? What could this mean for education?
3. What do you mean when you refer to mutual aid and reciprocity in your work? How have you seen it manifest through *Trade School* vs. *OurGoods*?
4. In talking about *Trade School* you mention the lack of “class mobility” in school and how schools don’t recognize how people are separated? Why do you think this is the case? Is *Trade School* a useful subversion?

5. You've said your projects often lead toward "the impossibility of transcending history". What does this mean, and is this relevant to the institution of education?
6. Can you talk about the show you did at your high school. What was it like to re-enter that space? What was the school culture when you were in high school and has it changed?
7. You mention your caution toward online learning. How do you respond to avalanche of new online learning initiatives? What are teachers to do?
8. How do navigate your multiple identities as an activist, artist, teacher, woman, and daughter? What about the perceived value of these identities? How do they differ and change (ie. when someone asks 'what do you do for a living'?)
9. Do you think schools can and should participate in a solidarity economy? What would this look like?

**Kate Clark**

1. Can you talk about the *Native Stars* project in Anacostia, DC. How did this project unfold as a kind of ethnographic experiment and what kinds of learning were taking place?
2. History and historical research play a big part in your practice and process. Can you talk about situating your projects historically?
3. In Old Town you are playing with a notion of re-enactment. Are you interested in the performance of history, of telling and remembering new truths and stories?
4. Can you talk about Old Town's relationship to colonialism, and assimilation within San Diego's history?

5. Ritual plays a big role in your practice. What are some of your personal rituals?  
What kinds of rituals did you have when you went to school or at home?
6. You often take on this role of interpreter inside museums, in public. What does it mean to interpret a cultural space? A public space? Are you trying to subvert this role?
7. Do you find that your projects intentionally take on a pedagogical role? Are you attempting to interface with a particular public or counterpublic?
8. Can you talk about projects you've done overseas in Japan, France and elsewhere? How does your practice or approach to a project change, if at all?

## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

**Introduction:** Hello and welcome to this group discussion. My name is Chris Kennedy and I am here working as the facilitator/moderator. As you know I have been working on a dissertation research study, *Mycological Provisions*, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We are at the final stage of the study, a reflection-based focus group with participants involved in the project.

**Purpose:** First of all, I would like to thank you all for taking the time to participate in this study so far, and for taking time out of your day to join this conversation. The overall goal is to provide a space to reflect on our engagements, and to share stories and further thoughts about the ideas brought up during our time together.

The overall goal of the study is to critically interrogate ideas of art education, and to further complicate the role and identity of the contemporary teaching artist. In particular, I am interested in hearing more about your experience of the facilitated mushroom hunt, and any ideas about art education and the role of teaching artists that may have come up since our time together. The idea here is to share and listen to stories from other participants, and to collaboratively identify any instances of overlap, or difference in your experiences.

The purpose for setting up the focus group meeting include:

- You are the experts and we are here to learn from you
- This is strictly voluntary
- I will be taking some notes later on, and the session will be recorded via audio tape so that we don't miss anything important and so that I can go back and revisit the information if I need to.

#### **Housekeeping:**

- The total length of time of the focus group meeting is expected to be about 2 hours

As far as the focus groups are concerned, there are a few “ground rules”

1. I might move you along in conversation. Since we have limited time, I'll ask that questions or comments off the topic be answered after the focus group session I'd like to hear everyone speak so I might ask people who have not spoken up to comment

2. Please respect each other's opinions. There's no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. I want to hear what each of you think and it's okay to have different opinions.
3. I'd like to stress that we want to keep the sessions confidential so I ask that you not use names or anything directly identifying when you talk about your personal experiences. We also ask that you not discuss other participants' responses outside of the discussion. However, because this is in a group setting, the other individuals participating will know your responses to the questions and we cannot guarantee that they will not discuss your responses outside of the focus group.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS SO FAR?

Again your participation here today is totally voluntary. So if you are okay with moving forward, we would like to get your consent.

**Focus Group Questions:**

1. Can you describe your experience of the mushroom hunt?
2. In what ways has your thinking about art or education changed, if at all?
3. What is the future of art education?
4. What else do you think may be important to include or reflect upon?

I think we've come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.

Again, thank you very much for your participation today. We really appreciate your help.